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CHAPTER I

GREAT SCOTT! What are you doing there, little thing?"

Fay started as if she had been shot, and felt somehow guilty, though "there" was only the top of a low set of folding steps, used by the grown-ups (when any of them did use anything in the dignified great library) to reach books on high shelves.

It was her father who asked the question, and the child cherished a secret hero-worship of her father. Therefore, she was frightened at the thought of displeasing him. Indeed, she was frightened even at the thought of facing him alone. On the rare occasions when she saw him, it was during a brief visit of his to the nursery; or in staring through the window to catch a glimpse of him on a bay horse in the morning, or dashing swiftly away in his car; or else on foot, walking fast, very smart, and tall and slim. In fact, not like a father at all, as regulation fathers are shown in pictures and books.

She shook back the mane of corn-coloured hair which had screened her face as she crouched over the large volume on her small knees.

"I'm—reading," she confessed, with a stifled gasp. "I mustn't take out the books that belong in this room, so I have to come here if I want one. I didn't—know you'd mind."

"I don't mind," said the handsome young man, so pleasantly that Fay no longer feared she had committed a crime. "Is it some big picture-book you've unearthed?"

Without waiting for an answer, he came close and bent to see her choice.

"Good Lord!" he exploded. "Shakespeare! 'The Tempest!' Surely you can't read those long words—you can't understand what it's all about!"

Fay gazed up at him gravely.

"I can read most of the words," she apologised rather than boasted. "I don't know what they all mean, but when you *want* dreadfully to know, you think and think, and in the end you guess right."

"Oh, *do* you?" Sir Hugh Ffrench was suddenly taking an interest, was even moved to curiosity, and the child got the thrill of this through some sensitive intuition. She felt a warm throb of happiness, because *she* had taken an interest for so long—apparently an unrequited interest—in this young man. It was splendid to have him actually look at her as if he *thought* about her! It was quite a different look from any he had ever given her before.

"I'm not sure it's good for you to 'guess' what all those words mean," he laughed. His teeth were very

white in contrast with his brown face, and he smelt nice, Fay thought—a little like cigarette-smoke, a little like faintly perfumed soap, a little like—like—yes, *heather*. It was a clean, *man*-smell, the child told herself, as her father stood near, looking down at her, she looking up at him. "How old are you?" he abruptly asked.

"Seven," said Fay. "Going on eight."

"By Jove, yes! I ought to have remembered," Hugh Ffrench exclaimed. "Married the second year of the war, wasn't I? Time seemed long enough then, but I always think of you as about four or five. You're such a mite! I didn't dream you were out of your 'A.B.C.—cat, rat, or bat' books yet. Who on earth taught you to read Shakespeare? Not—your mother?"

"Oh, *no!*" Fay replied. "Not Sandie."

"Is that what you call her?" (It seemed to the child that the brown face, which had been so kind and smiling, stiffened. She had known before, that it could be hard.)

"Yes," she admitted. "Everybody calls her that, you know—or Princess—or Butterfly—everybody who comes to our house—such lots of people!"

"Lots of men," amended Ffrench.

Something in his voice puzzled Fay. The gaiety and pleasantness were gone.

"Ladies, too," she explained, after an instant's hesitation. "Lovely young ladies. But not any so lovely

and young as Sandie—*mother,* if you'd like me to call her that."

"Call her what you choose—and she chooses," said Ffrench. "What, by the way, is your name for *me?* I don't believe I've ever heard one from you, you're such a shy mouse. Does it run to 'father' or 'dad'—or do you prefer 'Hugh'?"

"I always think of you as *'Sir'* Hugh, because Nurse calls you that," reflected Fay, "and so does Sandie if she speaks of you to Nurse."

"And if she speaks of me to you?"

"She doesn't," the child replied, then hastened to add, lest his feelings should be hurt by the omission, "At least, I don't remember hearing her. And she isn't with me much. She can't be. She's too busy."

"Busy!" echoed Ffrench. "Heaven save the word! But that brings us back to you again, doesn't it? Who sent you here to the library to browse among volumes of Shakespeare and other grown-up literature?"

"No one ever sent me." Fay relieved all but herself of blame, if blame there were. "But no one told me I mustn't come. If Nurse thinks I'm playing, she often goes down for a talk with Mrs. Jennings—the housekeeper, you know—and stays away a long while. I like reading better than playing, now I'm so old, because I haven't anyone to play with really, so one day I walked in here, and the books looked so splendid in this beautiful red and gold, all alike on the outside, but so different inside, they just fascinated me

—father. Nurse found me once when I'd left the door open, but she didn't care, if I promised to be careful and never take a book away from the room. She said books would keep me out of mischief. I don't think I do much mischief—except break a *very* few things now and then; but I suppose I *do* tease Nurse sometimes, asking questions. She hates children to ask questions."

"H'm!" grumbled Sir Hugh. "How can they learn anything if they don't ask questions?"

"Well, I learned to read all by myself," announced Fay with some pride, "after I'd made Nurse teach me my letters and a few of the words in the first picture-book. I *wanted* so very much to know how to read. It's just like what *you* said, father, about 'time seeming *long.*' It seemed very long to me—the days —and they were so much like each other. But with books I can live in lots of people's lives."

"You amazing little person!" muttered the young man, gazing at his one small daughter as if she had dropped from Mars. "I wonder if you're going to turn out a genius or something? Of course, you ought to have had a governess—a real governess, a year or two ago—not one of these fakes who call themselves 'nursery-governesses,' and probably can't spell a word of three syllables, or do the simplest sum except on their fingers. If I hadn't thought of you as a baby still I'd have made a fuss about this. But it's not too late yet. Look here—tell me what else you've learned. Any arithmetic?"

Fay shook her head.

"Music?"

"I've got my doll's piano. It's a real piano, of course, but very small, and it won't make much sound. When I hear a tune, though, I try to play it over on that. And I love studying books about stars. They seem as real as this world, almost. I pretend I live in one of them sometimes."

"I see," said Sir Hugh. "And I see that we must have a change—immediately, if not sooner! Do you know anything of your—er—the Princess's movements? When's she expected home to-day, for instance?"

"She's going out to a party to-night, I know," said Fay, "because I heard her telling Hortense this morning about a new dinner-dance frock she hoped would arrive in time. So she's sure to be home early. She hates to get ready in a hurry, especially when she has something to put on she's never worn before. She lets me watch her dress sometimes, if I don't talk and make her and Hortense jumpy."

Ffrench pulled out his watch and glanced at it—a gold watch so flat and thin that Fay wondered how it could "hold all the tick."

"No good thinking of a consultation with her, then," he mumbled. "But you're *going* to have a governess—immediately, if not sooner. So that's that! And she'll have to be just the right one, too! Your Aunt Mary'll get her for me, and trot her out for me

to inspect before I go away again. I won't trust anyone's judgment in the matter except Mary's or my own, now you and I have had this talk, my infant prodigy."

Fay seemed to know, somehow, that it was especially *Sandie's* judgment which was not to be trusted. Perhaps Sandie would be cross about the governess. She was a little cross sometimes, almost in the way that a child is cross—a very pretty, spoilt child, though she was as sweet as honey if nothing bothered her. But certainly *she'd* not like the worry of choosing a woman to take Nurse's place, so perhaps it might be all right for Aunt Mary to decide, and save Sandie trouble.

Ffrench put back the thin watch, and then took the child's face between those brown, strong-looking hands of his, kissing her good-bye. This time he kissed her on the lips, instead of on top of the head, as usual when he kissed her at all. Then, half reluctant, half amused, he left his daughter to return to "The Tempest" again if she wished. For some reason, however, Fay had lost interest in the exquisite fairy-tale and the splendid words which she had loved to murmur to herself, just above her breath. They were sweet and strange as the sound of the sea in a shell.

Sir Hugh—no, *father*—was going to choose a governess for her. At least, she hoped the chooser would not be Aunt Mary, his sister, years older than he, who

had never married. "That old maid" she had heard Nurse call Miss Mary Ffrench.

Father was about thirty. This seemed immensely old in years to Fay, but father himself looked young—almost as young as any of the crowd whom Sandie called her "boys" and her "slaves." Aunt Mary was forty, Nurse had said, and forty was only ten years more than thirty, yet Aunt Mary might almost have been father's mother, instead of his elder sister.

In several ways they resembled each other, for both were dark, with rather deep-set grey eyes, flecked with brown, and their noses were aristocratically high-bridged, their chins slightly prominent and obstinate. But father's eyes, thought Fay, were like dark pools of water in a forest which she had once seen when motoring; and their thick lashes gave them always a soft gloom, such as overshadowing reeds gave to those pools.

His black hair was brushed back from his forehead, and was satin-smooth, like a jet helmet; but there were white streaks in Aunt Mary's hair. Her eyelashes were not long, like father's, and she had no charming cleft in the middle of her chin like his. Though Nurse said she was well-off, Aunt Mary never wore pretty clothes, like Sandie's. She seemed almost to disapprove of beautiful things; anyhow, she disapproved of Sandie, who was very beautiful indeed, and very young—so every one exclaimed at first sight—to be the mother of a daughter seven years old.

To Fay, twenty-six was hardly *young*. At least, she couldn't imagine herself feeling young after living so many years.

Still, however, the fact remained that Sandie, who *had* been moderately young when she married—eighteen—looked, with her bobbed golden hair and short dresses, not much more than a child. It amused her sometimes to send for Fay when she had people with her—especially when those people were, as father said, men—and, drawing the prettily dressed little thing within her arm, bring their two faces close together.

Fay had once or twice caught sight of Sandie and herself grouped thus, like mother and daughter in an old-fashioned portrait, and had noticed how much alike they were—the same big, dark-blue eyes; the same delicate, rather impertinent little nose, and full lips clearly defined with the red of coral; the same yellow hair, too, except that there was a reddish-brown tint in the shadows of Sandie's, down at the bottom of the thick waves Hortense so cleverly crinkled in with a hot iron.

Fay told herself to-day that she would rather be like her father than like Sandie—but *not* Aunt Mary—oh, no!

The child had a sudden desire, as she thought of these things, to see Sir Hugh's and Sandie's pictures together, and also her own face in a mirror, for comparison's sake. She could do all these things at one and the same time if she went to the room which

Sandie called "my den," for there were quantities of framed photographs there, among them several of Sandie, and one of father, in khaki, taken just before he and the great heiress from California had made a sensation with their "war wedding."

Fay was not afraid to go to the den, although Sandie was out, for the beautiful "Princess" was the most carelessly good-natured person in the world, when her own pursuits and whims were not interfered with. Generally there were several boxes of marvellous chocolates, *marrons glacés,* or crystallised fruits, sent by worshippers, standing wide open, and all who wished—even the child—were free to help themselves.

It was only Nurse, not Sandie, who laid down any restrictions, and Nurse often said "Don't" and "You must not" simply to be cross or disagreeable, Fay believed. Anyhow, she was always allowed three chocolates, even big ones, considering herself "'pon honour" not to take more. Now she opened the door and stepped with confidence into the only modern room of the old, Queen Anne's Gate house—the only modern room, that is, with the exception of the bedroom above it, decorated to suit Sandie's fantastic taste.

The walls of the den were black, the ceiling a cloudy mixture of blue and gold, with queer splashes of purple, scarlet and green, like the lights in an opal. The carpet was black, too, making an effective background for a tiger skin, the pelt of a huge Polar bear, and a rare snow leopard. There was a great divan covered with

metallic stuff of a dull yet glinting gold—the same gold as the piano case, with its fantastic paintings—and on the golden divan were piled many cushions which matched the opal glints of the ceiling. The windows were hung with several layers of silk, thin as chiffon, each layer of a different colour, so that the light filtered through with the effect of a subdued rainbow. For dusk, and after, there was a wonderful system of "indirect lighting" which for Fay transformed the queer room into a fairy boudoir. You could turn on any one of the colours in the ceiling, according to your mood, or according to the music being played at the time.

Sandie played brilliantly, and sang, too, in a soft, low voice that somehow reminded Fay of cream and honey; but Sir Hugh said that she was no true musician (Fay had heard him say this), because she had the piano nearly covered with framed photographs. They were scattered all over a piece of gold brocade, embroidered with little semi-precious stones; and to-day there was also a green Chinese bowl filled with perfumed red roses.

Fay had come expressly to gaze at certain of these photographs. Mostly they were of more or less handsome young men in uniform, with decorations on their breasts, and the handsomest, most distinguished of all the young men, Fay thought, was her own father. His portrait, however, had been shoved far

at the back, perhaps because he disapproved of the collection, and round Sandie's pictures grouped a body-guard composed of Army, Navy and Air Force.

There was Sandie when she had been the beautiful Melisande Morgan of California, who had come over at eighteen to do "war work" in France. There she was a little later, as a radiant bride, and on the black wall was a painting of her at this period, by a very fashionable artist, not too *outré* in his work to make a pretty woman as pretty as she felt.

"Yes, I *would* rather be like Sir Hugh!" the child thought, glancing from photograph to photograph, and eyeing herself critically in the wonderfully framed Venetian mirrors that brightened the walls. "His eyes——"

Carefully she detached father's plainly framed picture from its obscure and crowded place behind many others, and carried it into the big window at the end of the room, which had been built out over the tiny, town garden. Here was a recess, with a low, cushioned seat which ran all the way round under the long, diamond-paned sashes. Fay curled herself up against a cushion at one side, where the pulled-back curtains—diaphanous as they were—fell between her and the room, like a tinted cloud. She studied the picture, wondering why "Sir Hugh" had looked so much gayer and happier when it was taken than he looked now—*much* younger, too—oh, *lots* younger!

"He's got *us* now, and he hadn't got us then," she reflected, having heard Sandie say that this photograph had been done just before she and Hugh were married. "I s'pose he must *like* us. And yet—he's away from us nearly always, far up north, instead of living with us here, or having us live with him there. It would be wonderful to live with Sir Hugh if he'd be the way he was to-day with me. I wish——"

But the wish broke almost before it was fully formed. The door was pushed open with such violence that it slammed loudly against the wall. Sandie bounded rather than walked in, followed by a young man. Not father.

CHAPTER II

DAMN!" snapped the youthful-sounding, almost childlike voice, which wasn't softly sweet like cream and honey now, but very cross and sharp. "Double, *double* damn! Don't dare to look shocked, Derry. Not that I care if you do. I hate everything and every one!"

"You *sha'n't* hate me," said the man who had followed Sandie into the room, and carefully shut the door, which had banged against the black wall. "I don't deserve it. I won't *have* it."

Fay, who didn't venture to stir, expected Sandie to be more furious than ever at being answered in such a way and such a tone. Once the child had heard Sir Hugh use those very words to Sandie—"I *won't* have it!" And Sandie had cried and stamped her foot. Then father, after staring at her for a minute, had looked sad and disgusted both. He had shrugged his shoulders, and, turning from the slim figure which flung itself face down on the gold divan, had stalked out of the room without another word.

That was a long time ago—*ages* ago; maybe more than a year; maybe two years; time *was* so long! And never had Fay heard father speak like that again.

He was very quiet and somehow cold. But Fay had never forgotten.

She was almost sorry for the man who had dared; but to her intense surprise, instead of breaking out into a rage or bursting into tears, Sandie laughed.

"You 'won't have it?' " she mocked him. "Oh, do you know, I rather like you when you put on that masterful air? It quite almost thrills me."

"If only I could thrill you as you've thrilled me, my darling, *darling* girl!" the man broke out, in such a changed voice that Fay was startled. It made her feel as she sometimes felt when Nurse took her to Westminster Abbey for Sunday service, and the great organ played notes like a human voice that went to your heart.

Apparently, however, this voice didn't go to Sandie's heart.

"I'm not your darling girl, please," she said, and bounced down among the cushions on the divan with much the same air as she had bounced into the room. Then she pulled two entirely useless pins, with cabochon sapphires for heads, out of her sapphire velvet hat, stabbed them into a parrot-green cushion, snatched off the cloche, slipped out of her ermine cape, and nestled down like a tired child. This was the very same divan on which Sandie had thrown herself to sob when Hugh "wouldn't have" something or other!

"I'm not even my *own* darling," she went on, "and when I'm not it's a sign that things are bad with me.

You know I've often told you—what I've had to tell a good many men—that I truly believe I'm the one person on earth I love. Give me a cigarette, will you? I've smoked the last of my little lot."

"Mine are rather strong for you," said the man, whom Fay knew by sight. His name was Derek Leavenworth. He was a lord, too—"Lord Derek Leavenworth," the child had heard his name announced by servants, and he was a captain, and the son of a marquis—quite a lot of things for one man to be. But then he was very tall and big. Fay had never seen anyone so tall, except policemen. Father, though he was tallish, would look almost like a boy if he stood beside this man. Fay had never seen them together. Still, she could fancy how they would look, and she told herself now that, though Lord Derek was so big and dark and somehow splendid, her own father had a *firmer* face—a face that would make up its mind and let it stay made up. Lord Derek might let Sandie make up his mind for him—or change it when he had made it up for himself.

Some such thought passed through Fay's head, though she couldn't have put it into words.

"I *want* something strong, after what I've just gone through!" Sandie sighed. "Cig, Derry, *at once!* I'll risk all consequences."

He laughed a little, too, and handed her his cigarette-case, open. It was a flattish gold one, with a

monogram or a coronet or something on it that sparkled.

"You're very brave about risking *little* things," he said.

"Big things, too, when I *want* to—not unless," Sandie returned.

"Derry" lighted her cigarette for her, as she lay on the divan, her ruffled, golden head on a pansy-purple cushion, her tiny feet stretched out, their diamond buckles glinting.

Fay wouldn't have supposed, from the way she was being brought up by Nurse, that it was polite to lie down like that when you had a visitor. But then, Nurse was very harsh and stern.

Fay didn't love her one bit. She hoped that Nurse would go away if a new governess came. Almost *any one* would be pleasanter to be with than Nurse!

Whereas Sandie was never stern. All she did was to fly out in these tempers sometimes, or else get a little bored with you, and want you to leave her in peace—leave her in a hurry.

"Exactly *what* had you gone through when I met you?" Lord Derek inquired. "Maybe you've forgotten that you haven't told me."

"I had no intention of telling you," said Sandie. "Still, I don't see why I shouldn't tell—if you'll promise to be awfully good and play the sympathetic friend. That's *just* what I need at this minute—a

sympathetic friend. You'll do as well as another, my dear!"

"*My* dear," he echoed, with a very different emphasis, "I'll try to be anything, or—a lot better—*everything* you need. But you must say that I'll do better than any other."

"Oh, well—p'r'aps. For the moment, anyhow," Sandie granted. "You *are* rather nice (it was sweet of you to send those red roses) and—and big—and I like the way your hair grows on your forehead. It's fun 'bossing' anything so big and black. And there's just a *tiny* thrill when you try to boss me, Derry-down-Derry. But don't take advantage of that confession. I 'won't have it'!"

"Derry-down-Derry" flushed through his Indian-dark skin, and, picking up the little white, pink-nailed hand that lay uppermost, he bent and kissed it. Almost instantly, however, he straightened up again in the low chair which he had drawn close to the divan.

Fay sat in her corner behind the curtains, puzzled, and at the same time fascinated by the scene in the gloaming. Through the mist of hanging, tinted tissues she could see the two figures plainly, though they looked somehow dream-like. And Sandie and Lord Derek could easily have seen the child had it occurred to them to be curious and peer through the curtains to the far end of the window-seat. But it didn't occur to them. They were completely absorbed in each other. And as Fay had had very few play-

mates in her seven years of life, she had never happened to learn that listening to other people talk when they don't know you are there simply Isn't Done. Nurse never talked to anyone about things she didn't want heard, even in a very low voice, when Fay was near—she was much too cautious for that—so this one big "Don't" had so far been left out of the curriculum.

Even if Fay had been "bored" (which she was far from being) she would not have stirred voluntarily, lest for some reason—or no reason—Sandie's quick temper should rise again. Sandie was growing happier now. The cross mood was quite gone. It would have been unthinkable to disturb her!

The lovely little golden-haired lady in white and sapphire-blue looked adorable as she lay there, soothing her nerves with cigarettes and Lord Derek's compliments. Her long ermine cape, thrown off, had fallen from the divan to the floor, where it seemed to curl lovingly round the great glowing head of the tiger. Sandie made Derek light a "joss-stick," and then, as the scent of the incense spread through the room, at last consented to tell him her troubles.

"I was just coming in when I met Hugh leaving the house," she said. "This isn't one of his days, you know. He helped me out of the car, and I felt a little queer for a minute, when he proposed returning for a talk. I knew you might breeze along any minute, and—well, it's no news to you (is it, old

thing?) that my lord and master isn't one of your admirers. You and I are perfectly aware that we're good as gold, and on Platonic terms only——"

"Speak for yourself!" broke in the man, "I was never in my life so far from being Platonic."

"Well, I *do* speak for myself. But Hugh seems to think I've no right to have any friends of my own. He objects to them all, male and female—on general principles, one would say! I hate fusses, so on the spur of the moment my only thought was to get him away from the house. I told him that I didn't mean to go indoors at once. I wanted a little exercise. If he wished to talk with me, he could be my companion while I walked a few blocks. He agreed to that. And then I inquired why he'd favoured town with an unexpected visit, whether he was going to stay the night, and whither he was bound when we met at the door."

"I suppose he came because there's to be that big pow-wow about the mining industry in the House to-night—what?"

"Yes, that was it. He's dining with some of his dull old political friends, and expects to listen to their stupid speeches till all hours. That's *his* idea of pleasure, no doubt. It isn't mine. Mine's *quite* different, and that's why we don't hit it off—never did from the first, really. He thought I ought to give up the world, the flesh, and the devil, etc., and live in York-

shire with him, while he redeems the fortunes of his family, and that sort of thing."

"You'd die, little golden butterfly, up there in the black North," said Leavenworth. "Ffrench ought to have told you before he married you what he wanted, and have given you a fair chance to——"

"Oh, I can't exactly blame him there," Sandie cut in. "I must be honest. He didn't know there was coal on the place then. And it's natural that he wants to make money instead of living on mine. He never would have done such a thing. He made that clear when he—or no, when I—yes, Derry, I can hardly believe it of myself now, looking back—but I'm afraid it was *I* who proposed! I knew he was in love with me, of course. Any girl knows—even a girl of eighteen, as I was then. I was so disgustingly rich. I saw what was the barrier. So I just jumped over it by telling him I was half-mad about him, and couldn't *live* if he went back to the Front without our being engaged. Oh, I was too young to know my own mind! It was the lure of the khaki. Hugh was a thriller in khaki—I thought. But there it is! Eight years, and I'm only twenty-six now. Yet he practically lives in Yorkshire, and I in London, in this old family tomb of his which I've managed to make just *bearable!* It isn't so much *that,* though, as the hateful way he's always behaved to me about Fay."

"About Fay!"

If Leavenworth hadn't echoed the words in rather

a loud tone of surprise, Sandie might have heard the faint squeak which the window-seat gave as Fay jumped at the sound of her own name. In that case the child would have been called from her concealment, scolded as a naughty eavesdropper, and sent ignominiously out of the room. And that would have been the end of the episode; but there was to be more in it than that. It was to go beyond the stage of an episode.

The child was still sinning in ignorance. To her it seemed the right thing to sit as still as possible and not interrupt the grown-ups. So long as she didn't make a noise, and thus break short the important conversation, she was (according to her idea of the situation) doing no harm.

"Yes, about Fay," Sandie went on, the aggrieved note quivering back into her voice again. "Hugh married me because he loved me for what I *was,* and then he wished me to change to something entirely different, as if mechanically, the minute my child was born. I didn't *want* her, really—not then, I mean. I wouldn't have minded if I could have waited a few years. But I was *busy,* doing 'my bit' in the war as best I could—singing and dancing to entertain the soldiers who were fighting for us all, and giving my days and nights to charity concerts and bazaars and all sorts of good objects. I simply hadn't the time to spare, so I *was* annoyed. Still, I went through

with it. I was quite brave. But I'm not a *born* mother, I suppose."

"You're a born heart-wrecker. That's what you are, my Princess!" Leavenworth informed her.

"Well, I just can't help flirting a little. There's no harm in it, as *you* know, because you know *me*. But Hugh—he wanted me to be a regular *'nourice.'* I wouldn't. I couldn't. I found the baby a first-rate foster-mother, perfectly normal and healthy, and I tried to get a little fun out of life again, after all those boring months I'd had. *That* was the beginning of our fusses—Hugh's and mine. They went from bad to worse. *Nothing* I could do was right! Then coal was found at Harlow-Wood. Hugh had his excuse to cut loose, and be the hermit he really is by inclination. *I* have charge of Fay, not he, and I have all the bother of her. Not that there *is* much! Still, *he* never undertook the job, so why does he suddenly mix in? That was the trouble to-day. My dear, I'm *furious!* I won't stand it, I tell you!"

"But you *don't* tell me! You haven't told me yet," Leavenworth reminded her, as she sat up, and punched a cushion or two with charming, childish hands.

"Why, Hugh has the impudence to propose sending Nurse away—a *wonderful* woman"—"wonderful" was a favourite word of Sandie's—"whom I got over here from America to look after the kid when Fay was only a year old. She's been with us ever since. I know it's the other way round, usually. One gets

servants over from the old country to the new. And this one *is* a Scotswoman originally—from Glasgow or somewhere. But she was with a cousin of mine in California for ages—an invalid child. I knew her well. She's worth her weight in gold. And I pay her nearly that to lift all weight of responsibility off my hands. She takes perfect care of Fay, and the consequence is that I play with the kid like another child of her own age, instead of 'bossing' her, and having to make myself a dragon, as most mothers do. That is, I play with her when I have *time;* and she's really fond of me, I think. Now, according to Hugh, Nurse is to get her marching orders and a regular governess is to be brought in—a person by way of being a lady, whom I must treat as one, and entertain at luncheon every day, with her 'young charge.' The house will be *spoiled.* I sha'n't stop in it!"

"I don't blame you," said Leavenworth, "for being in a wax at having the reins snatched out of your hands like that. It sounds a little to me—if you'll let me say so—as if Ffrench had been looking round for some way of putting your back up. Besides——"

"Besides—what? Why don't you speak out? Why do you suddenly look so queer?"

"Wasn't aware that I *was* looking queer."

"Well, you are! Don't *you* aggravate me, too, Derry! I thought I'd squeeze some comfort from you."

"That's what I want to give you."

"Then finish what you began to say."

"It—wouldn't give you much comfort, I'm afraid."

"Out with it, or I'll scream!"

"I was only thinking that—er—you used the expression about the new incumbent, 'by way of being a lady.' It just struck me perhaps she——"

"Derry! I believe there's something *horrid* in your mind! You don't dare to think that Hugh——"

"No—certainly not!"

"That *was* what was in your mind!"

"It only passed through. I wouldn't have spoken if you hadn't forced me to, Sandie."

"Oh! Hugh's a bear, but I don't believe he's a beast. He wouldn't insult me—in my own house, unless———"

"Yes, unless."

"You mean unless he wanted to get rid of me—to—to make me divorce him."

"Things like that have happened before now, where a man and woman have drifted as far apart as you have. Ffrench may think you'd both be better off if you were free. You're so young. You're like a child, you beautiful, fascinating thing! And he's not much over thirty."

"The creature sha'n't come into my house!" Sandie burst out, almost crying.

"It's Ffrench's house, too. And you know the old saying, 'An Englishman's house is his castle.'"

"*Not* when he's married to an American girl—a girl like me! But I have told him, without any such hateful idea as *yours* in my head about his being in love with some woman—that I wouldn't stand it."

"What did he say?"

"He said 'We'll see,' in—in an iron voice."

"And then?"

"Then I just turned round and walked away from him as fast as I could. He'd told me he was going to see his old cat of a sister, to get her to recommend a suitable governess. That's what he *told* me. But now—well, anyway, I let him go on. And I came home, just in time to find you'd arrived and were surprised I hadn't got back when I promised."

"Ffrench let you come back alone?"

"Indeed he did. He never even called, or took a step after me, my dear man! Tell me, after hearing all this boring family history, what would *you* do in my place?"

"It hasn't been boring. On the contrary, I've never been quite so much interested in my life," Leavenworth said. "If you stay in the house, you'll find, perhaps in a very few days, that your ultimatum has been defied. Why not fling down the gauntlet yourself, instead of letting—some one else fling it down? Why not be out of the house before the person 'by way of being a lady' can be brought in?"

"Run away?" exclaimed Sandie.

"Something like that," said Lord Derek.

Fay felt as if she had been struck. Oh, she did love beautiful Sandie! It would be dreadful if Sandie ran away!

CHAPTER III

THE child had a wild impulse to rush out, throw her arms round the Princess, and beg her to stay. But her instinctive knowledge of Sandie's likes and dislikes were like a warning hand on her arm, holding her back. Sandie hated to be "mauled." No hugs.

A butterfly kiss, leaving lovely fragrance; a playful pull of the long, soft hair which fell lower than Fay's waist. And also Sandie disliked to be startled by the bursting in upon her of an unexpected child. Altogether, before she could have counted ten, very fast, after that wild impulse, Fay had settled down again, heavily sad, almost stunned by the prospect of a great loss which would presently fall upon her, unless—unless—— But *was* there an "unless?"

For a few moments there was a buzzing in her ears. She heard nothing save the echo of those words —"run away." Then suddenly she woke to consciousness of the two voices again.

"You *must* go now, Derry," the Princess was saying. "I promised to be at the Woolworths' early and have a look at the decorations. They have the most exaggerated ideas of my wonderful taste—and they're only beginners at the game in London, you know. I'll see you there. We may have time for a word between

dances—or I'll sit one out with you, maybe. Now I've only time for my bath and to dress. Hortense takes ages fussing with me. But I *do* pay for her pains, don't I? Good-bye—good-bye!"

"Won't you give me any satisfaction at all before you turn me out?" begged Leavenworth.

"If I decided now, perhaps it would be in a way you wouldn't like," said Sandie.

"Well, you know you've got a strangle-hold on me, Princess!" he almost groaned. "But you *must* make up your mind to-night—for your own sake as well as mine."

"'Must' is a big word!"

"You've just admitted that I'm a big man."

"Very well. That's enough, then. I won't admit anything more—*now.* Not *anything at all!* Good-bye!"

He was forced to go; but first he seized both the small hands, to crush them, one after the other, to his lips; and he must have pressed them hard, for Sandie cried out sharply, "Oh, my rings—my rings!" Then he had to kiss them again, to soothe the hurt away, and Sandie, laughing, relented sufficiently to walk out with Derry from the "den" into the big hall.

She wouldn't come back, Fay felt sure. When Lord Derek Leavenworth had gone, Sandie would run upstairs in her swift, darting way, and Hortense would be waiting in the fantastically Eastern-looking bedroom to undress her mistress for the bath.

Fay could see just what would happen—the marvellous room which, she'd heard said, was a copy of one in some far-off place called the Alhambra; the purple curtain half drawn aside from the smaller room of the marble bath which you got into by walking down marble steps, for it was sunk below the floor level. Fay could almost smell the rose scent of the pink bath crystals which, every morning and night, Hortense poured into the deep basin of crystal water. She could see the dressing-table of carved, orange-yellow malachite, lighted from behind so that it glowed as if illuminated by living sunshine within; and all the gold, turquoise-studded things; the sparkling cut-glass; the beautiful new dress laid out on the embroidered cover of the divan bed.

Oh, the Princess would be very busy getting ready for the dinner-dance! She wouldn't have time to come back to the den and pick up her scattered finery. It was the business of other people to pick things up when she flung them down. Still less would she have time to spare for her small daughter while she dressed to-night, after this scene of emotion.

Fay had never felt so sad, so desolate, in her seven years of life. Hesitating, knowing that what she wished to do she dared not do, yet impelled to do something—something vaguely desperate—she slipped off the window-seat and ran to the door. Then, seeing the ermine cape and blue velvet hat, an inspiration came. What if she gathered up Sandie's belongings,

and carried them all to the door of her bedroom?

It would be an excuse to go there. It was just possible that Hortense would let her in. Anyhow it was a plan worth trying.

Fay's small figure was almost hidden by the long white cape which she looped over her arm, and it was all she could do to keep its folds from sliding down under her feet, both hands being occupied, as they were, with hat, sapphire pins, and gloves. Above the piled ermine her small face peeped out, stained with streaming tears, which she strove anxiously to keep from falling on the fur. It was thus that Hugh Ffrench found her, suddenly pushing wide the half-open door of the "den" before the overburdened Fay had time to reach it.

This was a very different "Sir Hugh" from the smiling, kind young man who had talked with her in the library, not two hours ago! His expression made Fay's heart jump. She felt a hundred times guiltier than she had felt with the book in the library, though still she didn't know what she had done that was wrong. Sir Hugh's eyes were black with anger against *some one!* His straight brows were drawn together in a frown, so that they almost met. He looked pale through the tan of his skin that had always been so brown since the war—ever since the child's earliest recollection of him.

"So *you're* here!" he exclaimed. It seemed as if he

threw the words at her. Were they an accusation? And, if so, of what sin?

"Ye-es!" stammered Fay. "But—but I'm just going. I—I'm going to take these things upstairs to Sandie."

"Stop!" said Ffrench. "She can wait for them. How long have you been in this room?"

"I don't—know," hesitated the child. "It was—I came to look at—some photographs—only a little while after you went out—father."

"You were in this room with your mother when that da—when that fellow Leavenworth was here?"

"I was sitting in the window-seat when—when they came in," Fay timidly explained.

"Oh, that was it!" Ffrench comprehended with a sneer. "You weren't *with* her, then? You were amusing yourself in a corner. Did she—did they—know you were there?"

This question was a little easier to answer!

"No, father," Fay replied readily. "I kept quite still; I didn't think Sandie would like me to disturb her, so I was quiet as a mouse. They were talking so hard they never thought of looking round, or they could have seen me where I was."

"Talking so hard!" echoed Ffrench; and this seemed to make him angrier than ever, with a bitter kind of anger that made Fay feel very cold. "'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings!' You heard every word, I'll be bound—saw everything that happened!

Children have sharp ears and eyes! I hardly need ask you whether Leavenworth told your mother that he loved her, and she told him that I was a brute."

Fay began to shake all over, as if a cold wind blew over her lightly clad little body. She glanced up at her father, her wide eyes unable to leave his face. It looked tortured, and not good as it had looked before. It was cruel, almost wicked. The child bit her lip. Her breast rose and fell. She did not speak.

"Why don't you answer?"

Still she kept silent, her tears frozen dry.

"Have you been stricken dumb? Out with it! What's the matter?"

"N-nothing's the matter!" Fay managed to gasp, when she'd drawn a long breath. "But—but I don't *want* to—father! I don't want to tell you or—or any one—what Sandie said and that man said."

"If you don't tell me now, I shall think all the worse of them," Ffrench threatened.

"Sandie didn't say anything bad," the child protested, "except 'damn' when she first came into the room. And you say that sometimes. So do all the servants."

"I haven't asked for your opinion," Sir Hugh threw back. "I asked *what* they said."

Fay pressed her lips together.

"You're suddenly very loyal—honourable, perhaps you'd call it," Ffrench answered. "Yet you confess that you sat there all the time eavesdropping!"

"What's—what's 'eavesdropping'?" the child inquired in a small, anxious voice.

"Eavesdropping is what you did—hiding, keeping still while you listen to a conversation when people think they're by themselves. If a boy did that at school he'd be sent to Coventry—and jolly well he'd deserve it!"

"I don't know where Coventry is," chirped Fay, "or whether little girls can go or not. But nobody ever told me not to listen to people talking. And I would not have done it to Sandie if I'd known it was bad. And I don't know whether it would be bad or good to tell you what she and the man talked about. But—but I know this, father. Something inside won't let me. I just *can't.*"

The two stared at each other for a moment, Fay frightened yet determined, and Hugh furious at first. Then suddenly his face changed and softened. Impulsively he went down on one knee, and put his arms round the tiny figure smothered in folds of ermine.

"My dear little girl, forgive me!" he said. "I must have been out of my mind, to try to make you—you, of all people—my own child—do a dishonourable thing! It would have been dishonourable; it would have been —*beastly*—for you to tell tales on your mother. You didn't know there was any harm in listening, you say, and I believe you. So it wasn't wrong that time, because you didn't understand. But you'll never do it again, anywhere or to any one, so long as you live, I'm

sure. And you'll never tell tales out of school, as they call it, either. I was a *cad* to want you to do that—to want it even for a minute. There's *no* excuse for me. But if there could be an excuse it would be because I was quite mad, and saw red. I beg your pardon, little girl, for trying to make you do a caddish thing, and I respect you for standing by your own right instinct. I'm afraid I frightened you, but if I did you were all the braver to stick it out."

"I wasn't exactly frightened," Fay said, nestling into the man's arms as she had never nestled into any arms since her birth. "I wasn't afraid of anything you'd do, like boxing my ears or shaking me. It was only that I hated not to do what you asked me to do, and feeling I *couldn't.*"

"Box your ears or shake you! Good heavens, I should hope not, you little frail flower!" exclaimed Ffrench, holding her close, and leaning his sleek black head against her golden one as if he longed to make up to her for his injustice—his "caddiness," as he called it, of one mad moment. "Did any one ever shake you or box your ears?"

"I—I don't think I want to tell you *that,* if you won't mind *very* much," pleaded the child.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Hugh. "You've got me again. Well, anyhow, it wasn't your mother who did that, was it?"

"Oh, no!" Fay eagerly protested. "She's sweet. She wouldn't hurt anybody for anything, I think."

"There are other ways of hurting people," said Ffrench, "besides striking or shaking them. But never mind. I know who didn't do it, so by process of elimination I can pretty well guess who did. Good Lord, what have I been thinking of to neglect the one creature I may hope to win love from—neglect her all these miserable, wasted years? But from this day I've turned over a new leaf. Fay, my little lamb, life is going to begin for you and me, from to-morrow—a *good* life, no matter what may have to happen between your mother and me. Will you try to love me a little from now on?"

"I do love you already—*lots!*" said Fay, dropping all her beautiful burden to clasp him warmly. "I've loved you for ever so long, Sir Hugh—I mean father. I've watched you from the nursery window, and looked at your photograph—oh, *very* often. That was why I came in here this afternoon, because the only picture of you in the house is on the piano, behind the others——"

"The only picture of me in the house—behind all the others! Yes, that's that!" Ffrench gave an odd laugh, but Fay wasn't frightened now. "I don't care —at least, I'm not going to care, as long as I have you," he went on. "And to-morrow you'll have some one to look after you as you ought to have been looked after long ago—a nice, jolly girl, not so old she won't enjoy playing with you, but so clever she can teach

you all the splendid things that make life interesting. Pretty, too! I've seen her photograph."

"Did you see the photograph at Aunt Mary's, father?" asked Fay. She was remembering, though not comprehending, what Lord Derek Leavenworth had said to Sandie about that governess, and what Sandie had said to him. They had talked in such a queer way, each one stopping in the midst of a sentence, or interrupting the other; yet the two had seemed to understand all the parts left out as well as the parts put into words. Indeed, it must have been the parts left out which had upset Sandie so much that she'd threatened to run away. Yes, if she did that, it would somehow be the fault of the new governess, or of Aunt Mary, or father. Fay wanted dreadfully to understand, but she felt that she must be as careful about asking questions as about answering them—for Sandie's sake. Sandie was so beautiful and so bewitching you couldn't help loving her, even if she didn't love you!

"Yes, I saw the photograph at Aunt Mary's," Ffrench explained willingly. "I told you Aunt Mary would help, and know just what I wanted for you, didn't I? Well, I was in even better luck than I expected, for Mary, who's always finding cooks and companions and governesses for her friends—even wives and husbands sometimes!—had just the right person for us within reach. It's a Miss Nina Dolarro. Isn't that a romantic sort of name? I know you like ro-

mantic names and things—what?—or you wouldn't take the trouble to fag up all the big words in Shakespeare's plays, at the age of seven.

"This girl is half Irish, half Italian, and she's lived for several years in France and in America. So think of the doors she can open for your inquiring mind, my kid! The door of the French language, which is beautiful as the music of a violin when it's spoken right; and of Italian, which is rich and full, like 'cello music. I shall only have to forbid her teaching you any American slang. If there's any going that's worth picking up, I'll pick it up myself. It's not for baby girls! Now, aren't you excited about to-morrow? Nurse shall be given six months' wages, and sent back to the States if she wishes to go. You can keep her on as well as the new governess, for a few weeks, if you want to. But *do* you want to?"

Fay thought for a moment. She would like nothing better than never to see Nurse again, even if there were only the servants to take care of her, instead of a romantic, half-Italian girl named Nina Dolarro. But—oh, what would Sandie say and do? Father didn't *know* how she felt about the governess. Or did he know a little, and not care? Sandie had told Lord Derek that she and he had had a row, and that she'd turned and left him in the street, on the way to see "that old cat, Mary."

"I think I want to do what you and Sandie would like me to do," the child said at last, with diplomacy

beyond her years. But it was not the diplomacy of cunning wisdom; it was the wish to be kind, to *hurt* no one, which had been born in Fay's heart—the christening-gift of some fairy godmother.

Ffrench did not question her again on that subject. He smiled faintly at her reply, and the twinkle that for a moment lightened the sadness of his eyes showed that he read between the lines.

"Don't worry," he said; "it's going to be all right. Everything's going to be all right—for *you.* Now I'll ring for James to carry those things upstairs to your mother, and you I'll take straight to your nursery. Isn't it about time for your tea, or whatever you call it?"

Fay said that it was about time. She was disappointed not go to Sandie's door with the wraps as an excuse to win admittance; but even if she could have gone, all the chances were against her being let in, or having a word with Sandie. Besides, father was so wonderful—as if to atone for his moment of black anger—that the child was almost consoled. He was dear, he was sweet. *Nobody* could run away from such a man, so much handsomer and nicer than Lord Derek Leavenworth, or any other of the Princess's "slaves." Probably Sandie hadn't meant what she said. Or, anyhow, she would change her mind.

The child felt happy again, strangely, excitedly happy in her father's arms, as he pleased himself by making a baby of her and carrying her upstairs. He

didn't put her down until the door of the nursery had been opened to his knock, and for the first time Hugh Ffrench looked critically at the room.

Somehow until to-day, when he had come upon her reading Shakespeare in the library, the man had never thought of his child as an *individual.* She was a pretty little, yellow-headed thing, the image of her lovely, disappointing mother, who had broken his best ideals and made him believe all beautiful women frivolous.

He had never seen her except in the nursery, and though she was docile, evidently well brought up so far as manners were concerned, she seemed to have little initiative, no warm, impulsive affections. Just those few minutes, those few words and looks over the book in the library, however, had given him a new point of view. Here was a young *soul,* starving for love and all kinds of enlightenment. This wasn't the environment for her!

Ffrench didn't know much about children's nurseries, but he had a vague impression that they ought to be gay, bright big rooms, with clean distempered walls and perhaps dados of pictures—animals or fairies—to please childish imaginations. There ought to be painted furniture, and gay chintz, with flowers or fruit, and lots and lots of toys.

This nursery had just been made over from a bedroom, and not very much made over at that. There was an uninteresting, Victorian sort of paper on the walls whose only merit was that it looked expensive.

The big, heavy furniture was Victorian, too. The carpet was in shades of brown, with tiresome roses on it, and there were very few toys—just a family of dolls that might have been chosen by Nurse, and some mechanical things which, Ffrench feared, had been his own Christmas presents to Fay, ordered haphazard, with as little trouble to himself as possible. This should be changed! Another Christmas was coming in two months. It should be such a Christmas as this child had perhaps never dreamed of!

Nurse, so she said, had just been about to look for Miss Fay and bring her in for tea. It was very kind of Sir Hugh to fetch the child. Nurse hoped she hadn't been naughty or troublesome? She was generally allowed to run about the house a little, following her walk and her afternoon nap.

Hugh, studying the woman's hard face, selfish eyes, and somewhat cruel nostrils, reproached himself for having left important things in Sandie's hands—those careless little hands!—so long. He answered politely, and then informed Mrs. McClellan (Nurse's name was McClellan) that he would like to speak with her outside in the hall for a moment. Fay's heart hammered against her little side when the two left her alone with the dull-faced dolls which she had never greatly loved. Would Nurse go into one of those sullen, fierce "tantrums" of hers (as the servants called them), or would she burst out crying? Oh, the child dreaded to have her come back!

By and by she did come back, but Sir Hugh was with her. He stayed, and was introduced, somewhat languidly, to the dolls. By the time he had to go—doubtless to dress for that "boring political dinner" Sandie had told Lord Derek about—Nurse had had time to recover her balance, in case she had lost it. The child clung to her father for a moment at parting, with a dread of what might be in store for her after he was out of the way.

But he must have "put the fear of the Lord" into Nurse, to quote her own words used sometimes to her charge. The dour woman was dour, as always, but there was no pinchings, no slappings, no shakings. She did not even tell Fay that anything unusual had happened; but perhaps some word would have escaped the trap of those thin lips if Sandie had not thrown open the door while the little girl was being undressed for bed.

This was an unexpected honour, a surprise vision! Never, Fay thought, had she seen the Princess look so like a *fairy* Princess. She glittered from head to foot, from diamond wings in her gold hair to buckles of brilliants on her high-heeled silver shoes. But she spoke not a word. She didn't seem to hear Nurse's "Good-evening, my lady." She merely gazed at the half-undressed child for a moment, her eyes very big and bright, her colour coming and going. Then, throwing up both hands in a puzzling gesture, she shrugged her shoulders, turned, and went out.

Fay expected Nurse to remark aloud upon this somewhat startling behaviour of "her ladyship's," but the only comment she made was a grunt.

It was all Fay could do, when she had been left alone in bed, in the smaller room next door, not to cry, for the dreadful thought was in her mind:

"What if Sandie was going to run away that night, and should never, never come back again?"

There was nothing she could do, except wait and wonder—wonder.

Her mind travelled back to the moment when Sir Hugh had come into Sandie's "den."

He had been very angry—not at her, but at some one. She thought that "some one" must have been Sandie. Perhaps he had met Sandie and Lord Derek together just outside the door of the "den," in the hall. Yes, that must have been it. Sandie had said that Hugh didn't "admire" Derry. Maybe it was worse than that. Maybe he didn't like the big, dark man at all. And, of course, he couldn't help knowing that they had just come out of the "den." Sandie received all of her friends there, never in the great drawing-room, except when she gave big parties. Oh, *what* had happened in the hall to make Sir Hugh look at her as he had looked, to make Sandie—gay, talkative Sandie—look as she had looked during that dead moment of silence at the nursery door?

CHAPTER IV

FAY was icily sure—sure that she would never find out just what had happened to alter "Sir Hugh" so suddenly, and to make Sandie so different from the only Sandie the child had ever known. Besides, what good would it do if she could find out? What good to her, or any one?

Life had never meant much of merriment or joy to the little girl. There had never even been much excitement in it. Often she had wished, rather vaguely, that the to-morrows needn't always be exactly the same as the yesterdays and to-days. Yet now she was stricken in the night with a dreadful fear of change. If Sandie should be gone out of her life—if she should never see beautiful, laughing, petulant, sweet, unaccountable Sandie again! Oh, she would a thousand times rather keep Nurse for ever, even when she was grown up, than lose Sandie because Nurse had been sent away!

"It's awful to be so much *littler* than they are, and not to have any power at all!" Fay said to herself half aloud, in a way lonely children have. Something told her that when Sandie had rushed into the room, a shining vision, stared in silence for a moment, and then flung up her hands in a queer, desperate way, it

had meant good-bye. The child had been too dazed to realise the full certainty of this at the moment, though she had been filled with bewilderment and fear; but now, alone in the darkness, she was *sure*. She was sure, too, that she must do something to bring Sandie back.

At first it had seemed that she was helpless, until she remembered a favourite saying of Aunt Mary's: "Where there's a will there's a way."

Now the previously dreaded proverb became a prop. She clung to it. The words must be true, or Aunt Mary wouldn't say them, for Aunt Mary was very truthful indeed—"disgustingly truthful," Fay had heard Sandie put it, "especially when any disagreeable truth can be told to *other* people about themselves."

"I think I'll pray to God and ask Him to give me the will so I can find the way," was the inspiration that came all of a sudden; and Fay slipped out of bed on to her knees.

"Now I lay me" and "Our Father Which Art" were the only prayers that had been taught her by Nurse; but she had invented a few of her own, such as asking Heaven to make Sandie love her. Never had she offered this request concerning "Sir Hugh," for it hadn't seemed possible that even Heaven could turn his attention to so small a thing as herself. Yet here he was, actually *loving* her without the agency of any prayers! God must have known what she really wanted in her heart, and have made it come true.

Therefore God wasn't, perhaps, the fearsome Personage always waiting about to find a chance of punishing you for the least thing, like not going to sleep when you were told, or not finishing the food put on your plate. He might be kinder than you thought, just as Sir Hugh was more affectionate to little girls than you'd dreamed he could be. And, anyhow, God was very powerful. Otherwise, people wouldn't have gone on building great big churches to pray to Him in, and sing hymns of praise.

"Oh, please God, give me the will to bring Sandie back and keep her with me," the child adjured the Almighty. "And show me the way, because there must be a way, and You know what it is, because You know everything, don't you? Oh, and when You've shown me the way, help me to *do* the thing, whatever it is, no matter how hard. Amen!"

When she had added the last word with strong emphasis and a kind of mental intoning such as she had heard and admired in church, Fay crawled back into bed again. The window in her room was always left wide open, top and bottom, according to strictest modern methods, and Fay shivered in the linen sheets as she snuggled down under the covers. She hated cold, and felt it severely, not being an "out-of-doors" child; but the very discomfort she suffered brought to her mind a wonderful idea.

"If I could only get very ill, now, quite quickly, and have to call some one to help me," she thought, "I

expect they'd telephone Sandie to come home from Lady Woolworth's party. And I *s'pose* she'd come. She can't bear to say 'no' to people when they ask her to do things—even to go and see sick ones. I've heard her tell that lots of times—though she doesn't *like* to see sickness, because it's not pretty."

Alas! the excitement of the thought warmed the small, shivering body. There was no hope that she had caught a chill—yet. Oh, dear, if she wanted to have a chill, she must get up and stand by the open window, just as she was, in her thin nighty, without a dressing-gown. It would be very, very unpleasant, but Fay was ready to suffer all things. She had no doubt that the idea in her head was a direct and instantaneous answer to prayer.

"I wonder how soon I can get the chill, so as to call some one?" she pondered. "By this time they must have finished dinner at the party, quite a long while ago. Prob'ly they're dancing now. Sandie loves to dance, so she won't go away anywhere yet. But if Lord Derry-down-Derry is there, p'r'aps he can *make* her go. It seems to give her a thrill to have *him* make her do things, though she won't stand it from Sir Hugh."

Evidently there wasn't a minute, or even a second, to waste. Shuddering at the martyrdom before her, yet eagerly facing it, the child sprang out of bed and ran to the open window. She wore a thin lawn night-gown elaborately made with lace and embroidery, sent

to her as a birthday gift by an American godmother she'd never met—that cousin Nurse used to take care of before Sandie bribed her back across the sea.

Ugh, how bitter the wind was! It was only October, but a chill October, and to-night there was a blowing mist of rain. The wide, old-fashioned window sill was damp, but Fay climbed up and sat on it, shaking in every limb. That would be the quickest way to make the illness come on in a hurry! She did wish it would come soon, and force her to cough out loud, or have what the grown-ups called a "temperature." Last spring she had "flu" and a temperature and everything, without trying at all. It would be hard if she couldn't get them now, when she wanted to so much!

The child was tempted to wrap her long, thick hair over her chest, like a shawl of warm, golden silk, but she resisted, for the least warmth might defeat her own great wish.

Long minutes of suffering passed. Fay was chilled to the bone, and her teeth chattered, but to her deep annoyance she didn't cough or feel really ill. She was only miserable. That was all!

If she counted the minutes they ought not to seem so interminable, because when you got up to sixty, there was at least the end of one minute, and you could go on with another. Perhaps in thirty minutes—thirty times sixty seconds—the cough would appear. Then she could go back to bed. If Nurse didn't hear

her through the shut door of the adjoining room, she would ring. The autocrat had issued strict orders against cowardice—disturbing the repose of others because of sudden frights after bad dreams, and that sort of nonsense. But if Miss Fay were really ill, then she must touch the electric bell which communicated with Nurse's sacred bedroom.

"One—two—three—four——" On the counting went. At first it was a comfort to the wretched child to hear her own whispering voice, like that of a companion in her ordeal. But presently the monotony confused her brain. She forgot how many times sixty she had counted. Then she forgot to count at all. Despite her shivering, despite her anxiety and the merciless cold, sleep clouded the weary brain. Fay nodded, roused herself, counted, lost count, and then lost consciousness of life as she was living it. She thought that she had got out of doors in her nighty, and had run through the night to Lady Woolworth's house, where the dinner-dance was.

Once she had been at Lady Woolworth's—a Christmas party in honour of a nephew, only ten years old, but with a title of his own because his father had been killed in the war.

It was a wonderful party, almost the nicest thing that had ever happened to the little girl until to-day, when she and Sir Hugh had "made friends," so she remembered quite well where the house was. She had sometimes persuaded Nurse to take her past it

since then, when they were out for a walk on their way to the Park.

In the dream it was snowing, each flake big and cold as an icicle. Fay stood in the street in front of Lady Woolworth's big house, and gazed through the windows. The curtains were not drawn: she could see bright lights, and crowds of ladies and men dancing. Sandie was there, with Lord Derek, and Fay tried to cry out her name, but her lips were frozen, and could not utter a sound.

"I'll have to get in where she can see me," the child thought, in the anguished strain of nightmare. She struggled to move, to break the sheath of ice which seemed to cover her all over, as the chain armour covered those still figures of knights in the hall at home—struggled in vain at first, and then—— With a shriek she came to herself—falling, falling!

* * * * *

All was dark confusion and horror. She was herself, yet not herself, for this dreadful thing couldn't be true! She—Fay—had turned to a statue of ice, and was falling out of the window—not Lady Woolworth's window, but the window of her own room.

There was a sickening instant of waking, of realisation. She had swayed, had toppled over in death-like sleep, and in sheer instinct of self-preservation had caught at something, she knew not what. Then, in the next moment, she knew it was real, and not a part of the dream. It had happened! She was hanging out-

side the window, clinging mechanically to the sill with one hand, and the other convulsively clutching a thick rope of Virginia creeper that curtained the whole front of the old house.

"Sandie! Sandie! Sir Hugh!" Fay heard herself screaming. Then, as her waking senses quickened, the child remembered that both Sandie and Hugh were far away. They could not save her.

"If I fall down and get killed they *will* bring Sandie home," was the thought that slipped through her brain. But oh, she didn't *want* to be dead, and see Sandie only when she—poor little Fay!—had turned into one of those prayer-book angels with wings and no body. She wanted to be alive in this world, and perhaps have Sandie hold her in her lap and learn to love her at last, truly love her as Sir Hugh had loved her to-day.

"Nurse! Nurse!" she called. "Please help me! Or God, will You do it, if Nurse isn't there?"

It seemed that Nurse was not there, for nobody heard, or came, not even God. And now she couldn't hold on much longer—hardly at all longer. The hand grasping the inside edge of the window-sill was stiff with cold, and her arm was losing its strength. When she had to let go there would be only the Virginia creeper left. She would slide down and down—and then would come a crash.

Fearfully she peeped over her shoulder at the pavement, which seemed a long way off, though the

"nursery suite," as Mrs. McClellan grandly called it, was on the first floor at the front of the house. Sandie preferred the back, with the tiny garden and freedom from night noise. There was enough light in the street to show how wet and shiny the pavement was. It looked dreadfully hard and cruel, and tears rushed to Fay's eyes because she was the only little girl in the world to whom such lonely, terrible things could happen.

"Oh, won't Nurse or God or *any one* help me?" she cried. And then steps sounded in the street, coming round the corner.

" 'Ello, up there!" shouted a man's voice. "Drop, and I'll catch you. Don't be afraid."

It was a big policeman, and suddenly Fay was not afraid, or hardly afraid at all. She knew that, when he said he could catch her, he could and would. He came close to the house, and standing directly underneath the window where the small white figure dangled, he held up his arms. Fay let go of the window-sill. She could not have held on ten seconds longer, even if the policeman hadn't come. But instinctively she clutched at rope after rope of Virginia creeper as she fell. There was scarcely a shock as she dropped into the upstretched arms, but for a moment she lay still, clinging to the man's wet shoulder.

"It's a lassie!" he told himself, as masses of hair curled over his arms and netted his fingers. "What

come to you to do the like, you poor kid? Was you walkin' in yer sleep?"

But Fay was past answering. A fit of sobbing gripped her. She cried, and wept, and wailed: "Sandie—Sandie! Oh, I want *Sandie* to come home!"

She was blind with tears, and half fainting with cold and exhaustion, and the reaction from fear. She neither knew nor cared what was happening as the policeman rang the door-bell and sharply pounded the knocker. She hardly heard him wondering aloud if everyone else in the house had jumped out of the bloomin' windows, since there seemed nobody alive to answer the door, if the blinkin' sky fell down!

With the master and mistress both away, the servants had lingered over their supper, and had been having a little music downstairs. It took James a minute or so to slip off a false nose and wig in which he had been amusing the company with comic songs; but when he saw who the visitor was, and caught sight of the burden that visitor held, he fell back dumbfounded.

"Sleepwalkin'," the policeman explained. "Just swung round my beat in the nick o' time to save the poor kiddy comin' a rare cropper. Little, delicate things like that shouldn't be left alone nights, seems to me—though it ain't none of my business, till they fall out o' windows. Listen to 'er crying! 'Tain't natural. She's gone off her crumpet for the minute. 'Oo's Sandie? It's Sandie she wants and must 'ave."

"Sandie's 'er mother, Lady Ffrench," said the foot-

man, taking the half-delirious child from the "bobby." "I'm afraid Nurse is about all she'll get. Her lydyship's dancin' at Lady Woolworth's."

"Can't you 'phone and get 'er?" persisted the rescuer. "Dang it, I've got two kids o' me own. I'd 'ate 'em to cry like that, and me not knowin'."

"Well, it'll be the nurse's business," replied James. "But I don't see 'er callin' up 'er lydyship. She'll think she can manage this job on 'er own."

"Afride the missus'll find out she was absent from 'er post—eh?" sneered the big man. "Oh, I see these nurses in the Park, and 'ow they be'ave. 'Ang it, that 'ouse of Lady Woolworth's is on my beat. I'm blowed if I don't leave 'er the message meself!"

"Gosh, I'd sooner 'twould be you than me!" said James. "Thank you all the same for wot you've done and wot you're abaht t' do. Shouldn't be surprised if you got something good out o' this from Sir Hugh Ffrench, w'en 'e 'ears you saved the child's life like you did."

"Tommy-rot! I don't want nothin'!" mumbled the policeman, striding off about his business. All the same, he dreamed about a fine Christmas that he and "the wife" might give the kids, in case Sir Hugh Ffrench insisted upon generosity.

Nurse had not yet gone to bed, though it was after eleven. She had been retailing her grievances to Mrs. Jennings, in the housekeeper's cosy room, telling tales of the millionaires she had served in America, who

would be only too glad to have her services again. She was far from pleased to hear James yelling her name from the top of the servants' stairs, and with due dignity took her time in answering the summons. Even when she saw the nightgowned, weeping child in his arms she did not come down from what in the servants' hall was known as her "high horse."

"Nice doings, Miss Fay, with you trapesin' all over the house in your night-clothes!" she shrilled. "What do you mean by it?"

" 'Twas out of the window she went," explained the footman, who lost little love upon Mrs. McClellan. "She'd be a dead corpse now, smashed like an egg, if it hadn't been for the bobby on his beat—caught 'er as she fell, and rung the bell to bring 'er in. The poor midget's as wet as a rat and cold as an ice-puddin'. She may get 'er death o' this yet."

"Nonsense! Don't give me any such talk as that!" snapped Nurse, almost snatching the child from his clasp. "The idea of her tryin' such monkey shines when my back was turned! She's safe and sound enough, no thanks to her common sense, and what I'll do is to give her a good hot bath."

As she carried Fay upstairs to her bedroom she shook the child angrily.

"Wanted to get me into trouble, did you?" she scolded. "I don't believe for a minute you were sleep-walkin'. You never did it before. Why should you now? I don't believe, either, you were near to fallin'.

You just wanted a fuss made of you, and waited till the policeman came along. *I* know you. And what you deserve is a whippin' instead of a nice hot bath. But I will give it to you hot and hot! You'll see, miss! I'll come as near boilin' you alive as the law allows!"

Fay's hysterical crying had ceased. Nurse's harsh grip and whispered menaces had calmed her throbbing nerves. The threats hardly frightened her. She had gone through so much, only to fail! Sandie wouldn't come, after all. It didn't very much matter what Nurse did—no, it didn't matter even if she died, if Sandie had run away with Lord Derry.

Nurse snapped on the electric light in the nursery bathroom. Next she turned on the hot water, which soon began to send up clouds of steam. Then she jerked off the thin nightgown, soaked with the rain which had poured over Fay as she clung from the window-sill. The child's long, wet hair Nurse twisted together in a thick rope, not caring how much she pulled, and fastened it with two of her own ugly black hairpins on top of the little head.

"Now," said the woman, "I won't let any cold water run into the bath at all till you give me your word about something!"

Fay stared up at her with great, questioning eyes.

"You'll tell your mother the truth about that trick you played to-night—that you wanted to spite me, and please your father, so you pretended to walk in your sleep and fall out of the window, when you knew all

the time there was a man ready to catch you underneath. Will you do that, miss?"

"I'll tell her the real truth," said Fay.

"What truth?" Nurse catechised suspiciously.

The child shut her lips tightly together.

"Answer me, or I'll——"

Fay tried to wriggle away from the fierce hand on her shoulder that felt sharp, like a wicked bird's claw. For an instant she was free, but Nurse caught her again, and to make certain that she could not escape, locked the bathroom door. The key was then pulled out and slipped into Nurse's pocket.

"Now will you answer me? *What* are you going to tell your mother?" Nurse took her under the arms, and held her high above the steaming bath.

"I don't think God will let you put me in that hot water," Fay said in a shaking voice. She had never thought so much about God as she had thought tonight, but twice it seemed as if He had answered her prayers. Once He had given her an idea when she asked for it. And then He had sent help when she hung out of the window and prayed to be saved.

"Much you've got to do with God, you irreverent imp!" flung back Nurse. "For the last time——"

Some one was turning the knob of the bathroom door. Some one was knocking imperatively.

CHAPTER V

ARE you there, Nurse, with Fay?" cried Sandie's voice. "Let me in. Let me in this instant!"

Fay could never know, now, whether Nurse would really have thrust her into the hot bath, or whether the threat had been a cruel "bluff," for it was Mrs. McClellan's turn to be frightened.

Hastily she put on the cold water. Then, with the naked child tucked under one muscular arm, she retrieved the key from her pocket and opened the door.

"My lady!" she stammered, her face anxious—for Sandie's return was a great surprise. She couldn't account for it, as James had not told her of the policeman's intention, and she had no way of guessing how much Lady Ffrench might know of what had happened. "I'm just about to give Miss Fay a hot bath," she announced, "to save her taking cold after the mischief's she's been up to in the night. As soon as the water's cool enough, I——"

But Sandie paid no attention to Nurse or her explanations. She took her child from the unwilling woman and set the slim little thing on her lap, wrapping the white naked body in an enormous bath towel.

"You poor mouse!" she cooed, sitting down on a chair hung with towels, Fay in her lap.

This was ecstasy! Sandie had never hugged her daughter so closely before! The child wound both arms round her mother's neck, and to her joy wasn't shaken off or told to stop. Sandie was squeezing her tightly, too. She was kissing her hard, again and again, not with little perfumed pecks, as at other times, but with real kisses of love.

"A great big policeman called and asked for me at Lady Woolworth's, and told me you'd nearly fallen out of the window," Sandie crooned softly, like a wounded dove. "I gave him twenty pounds."

"I had a bad dream," the child said, beginning to cry again, but this time from happy excitement. "I thought you'd gone away, and I couldn't *ever* get you back. But, oh—you will stay, won't you, now you've come?"

"I wonder what made you dream such a dream as that?" Sandie's face changed from soft sweetness to alertness in an instant. Her blue, dilated eyes searched the adoring eyes of the child. "What could have put such a fancy into your little head?"

Fay felt herself blushing. It seemed to her that she blushed all over. She longed to tell this kind, new, wonderful Sandie how she had listened that afternoon, without knowing it was wrong, and heard things she hadn't been meant to hear. She longed to do this, but was terribly afraid if she did, that Sandie would un-love her, and things between them would be as before—or even worse. Then as she hesitated whether

to speak or be silent, there came the same *decided* feeling she had had when she prayed for guidance how to bring Sandie back. Something seemed to say "Tell."

"*I* know what made me dream it," the child confessed shyly.

"If you please, my lady, don't you think I'd better give Miss Fay her hot bath first, and have the talk afterwards?" suggested Nurse. "She was very much chilled."

"She's warm as toast here in my coat," said Sandie.

"It may be fever," Nurse hinted.

Fay's courage rose. She couldn't lose this chance—she couldn't be separated from Sandie by cruel Nurse, who was scheming to do something clever and wicked to keep them apart.

"'Tisn't fever!" she protested, clinging to Sandie. "I'm well. I'm very well indeed. I want to stay with you."

Sandie was flattered by the intense love and longing in this little face which to her, until to-night, had always seemed like the face of a pretty doll. It was just a special mood, of course. "The Princess" had suffered a serious shock. Called to the home she'd half decided to leave for ever—called from a dance in the arms of Derek Leavenworth, who wished to join her life with his—called by news of her child's danger—all her emotions were roused, and warring together. Fay had suddenly become a creature of importance.

It made Sandie sick—physically sick—to realise how

she would have felt if she had heard news of the little thing's tragic death on this night of all nights. She was quite grateful to Fay for not being killed. Her heart was soft and warm for the child. For the first time since Fay's birth, perhaps, she was conscious of something like mother-love, and it was charming and dramatic, this little scene of reunion in the glittering white bathroom. In fact, she felt rather like the heroine of a very modern, exciting play—the ill-treated, misunderstood young wife, admired by every man except her husband, and adored by at least one; the beautiful, misunderstood woman, hesitating on the verge of a great decision; the girlish mother, almost (if not quite) ready to make a sudden sacrifice for this sweet baby's sake.

"The child is all right," Sandie said. "You may leave her with me for a few minutes, Nurse. I'll call you when I want you to come back."

There was nothing to do but to obey, and Nurse did obey, with angry eyes, a pursed mouth and a high chin.

"Now, darling, explain about the dream," Sandie began, when the door was shut; "and"—with a glance in that direction—"talk softly."

It had occurred to her that there might have been servants' gossip about Lord Derek, and that Fay had overheard something. If the subject of Derek were to come up, best to be careful! And you never could tell, even with respectable creatures like Nurse. They might listen at a keyhole!

(As a matter of fact, Mrs. McClellan, of Glasgow, or somewhere, was at this very moment engaged in that very act!)

"I do love to have you call me 'darling'!" purred Fay. "You never did before. Oh, you *won't* unlove me if I tell you what I did? Truly, I didn't know it was any harm till Sir Hugh—I mean father—said boys sent other boys to Coventry—wherever that is—for doing it. You won't send me there, will you?"

"No, I promise I won't 'un-love' you or send you anywhere," Sandie replied. But at the bringing in of her husband's name the pleasant, self-satisfied warmth in her heart was chilled. She had a sharp presentiment that she was to hear something unexpected, something extremely disagreeable. "Go on—do!"

"I was in your den, sitting in the window, when you and Lord Derry-down-Derry came in," Fay anxiously confessed, her heart thumping so hard that Sandie could feel it against her arm. Perhaps if she *hadn't* felt it she might have pushed the child away from her at the revelation. But even in her angry amazement she was half unconsciously touched by the little creature's fear, which mingled with the courage of love.

"Lord Derry-down-Derry!" Lady Ffrench repeated, in a tremulous tone. "I suppose you went and told your father I called him that!"

"No, I didn't," Fay insisted. "I didn't tell father anything at all. And I didn't 'went' to him. He just

happened to walk in after you and—that gentleman—had gone. And I was there."

"Oh!" Sandie's voice was sharp, though still suppressed. "And what then? I supposed Hugh pumped you—asked you questions?"

"He did for just a minute. But when I didn't want to tell—except I told him you hadn't said *anything* bad—he was sorry he'd asked, because it wouldn't be *nice* of me to tell things about my mother. He didn't even wish me to, as soon as he stopped to think."

"I see," returned Sandie. Her heart, too, was beating fast now. She wasn't afraid of Hugh, she told herself, or of anybody else in the world, and Hugh had been *horrid* to her—inexcusably horrid. Still, the thought that her conversation with Derek might have been repeated made her quite faint. It even made her rather ashamed, though she assured herself that there was nothing to be ashamed of. If what Derek had hinted about Hugh were *true,* he deserved anything! It was only if it were *not* true that she could be blamed; and even then—— But she believed that Fay's story, at least, was true, and there was an extraordinary sense of relief in believing it. Nothing was irrevocable—yet.

"And then," she went on more slowly, "your father lectured you for listening?"

"Not after I explained that I didn't mean to do wrong—that I sat still just because I didn't want to

disturb you," Fay pleaded. "Only he told me never to do such a thing again."

"Perhaps he was afraid you'd try it on him next time—and a fair lady!" Sandie exclaimed, with a forced laugh. "There's an old proverb about a 'pot not needing to call a kettle black.' But you don't know what that means, and you don't have to know! Now, I'm not asking you to betray your father's secrets, if he trusted you with any, you queer little kid. But I don't see why you shouldn't tell me if he said anything about a governess for you?"

"Yes, he said he was going to have one for me," Fay admitted with a pang, because for some reason the governess plan had made all the mischief with Sandie that afternoon. "But he wasn't going to get her himself. He asked Aunt Mary to do it. And she knew just the right one. Father's never even seen her, only a photograph that Aunt Mary showed him over at her house to-day."

Sandie received this information in silence. Fay watched her face anxiously. Never had she known it so grave, unless Sandie were cross, and she didn't seem cross now, only very thoughtful. Her cheeks, that had been so pink when she flew in, all in a hurry, had paled. Yet Fay had seldom thought her more beautiful.

At last Sandie spoke.

"What did Hugh say about the photograph—anything?" she asked.

"He said Aunt Mary told him the governess's name was Nina Dolarro, and she half an Italian girl——"

"Oh, a *girl,* is she?"

"That's what Aunt Mary told father," Fay persisted, with the uncanny tact of a woman-child, born knowing many things which she didn't yet know that she knew.

"What else did Aunt Mary tell father about this—this romantic-sounding person?"

"Why, she knows lots of languages, and she's been to America. So maybe you'll like her, don't you think, Sandie?"

Sandie laughed again—not, however, one of her sweet, gurgling laughs.

"I *don't* think!" she snapped slangily. "Still, we'll see! Is the person quite young?"

"Young enough to love playing with me, Aunt Mary told father. I hope she will. But Aunt Mary's so old herself, she can't know, can she?"

"Aunt Mary was *born* old, and she doesn't know *anything* that's worth knowing these days!" broke out Sandie. "She doesn't *want* to know anything good about me! Most of her swans are geese, but I have a sort of *flair,* she'd like to send a *real* swan into this house. Is the young, accomplished, playful Miss Nina Dolarro pretty—in her photograph?"

"Yes, father thought she was pretty," Fay replied. "I hope she is, because I like every one to be pretty. That's one reason why I love *you* so much. You're

the prettiest lady I ever saw. I should think you must be the prettiest in the world!"

This time Sandie's laugh was sweeter.

"A few men have told me so. I'm glad my small daughter shares their opinion," she said. "But maybe the new governess may make you change it."

"Oh, no!" protested Fay, nestling close to Sandie's loveliness. "She can't be as pretty as you, even if she is half Italian. Besides, I 'spect she'll be one of Aunt Mary's goose-swans. I know what you mean about them, because I remember Parsons, the kitchen-maid she got Mrs. Jennings to take. Parsons was *very* religious, singing hymns till cook nearly went mad, but she'd had smallpox, and she stole cook's best hat when she went away."

"Miss Dolarro may come in the hope of stealing something," remarked Sandie. "Not a hat—though the thing may begin with an 'h'! But if that's in her mind she won't be like Parsons. It will be the noble, the saintly Mary who'll egg her on to do the deed."

This idea seemed incredible to Fay.

"Oh, *darling!*" She almost patronised Sandie for so childish a fancy. "Aunt Mary wouldn't want any one to *steal!* Besides, Miss Dolarro's a lady. Ladies don't steal."

"Don't they?" smiled Sandie. "As for Mary Ffrench, your respected aunt, she'd be capable of *anything* if she thought she could sweep me off the board

—whistle me down the wind—for the little Yankee upstart she thinks I am!"

"How could it do those things to you if Miss Dolarro stole?" Fay earnestly inquired.

"It might, quite easily, if the lovely lady stole the particular object that I suspect Mary Ffrench of wanting me to lose," Sandie answered. "But enough about the two of them! Let's go back now to me—and you. Let's see; you were afraid I was going to run away and not come home. Would you really miss me quite a lot if that happened?"

"Oh, a *big* lot! More than I can tell!" cried Fay.

"I don't quite know why," Sandie said, with a faint suggestion of wistfulness. "I've never made much fuss of you, have I?"

"No. But you were always where I could see you every day. This house would be dreadful without you."

"The master of it wouldn't agree with you!" Sandie laughed. "You're rather a lamb, though! I don't think I ever quite appreciated you before. Look here, my infant, you seem pretty good at keeping secrets—if I can believe what you've said; and somehow I *do* believe. Would you promise and swear never to breathe a word—not to your father, or Nurse, or the wonderful Miss Dolarro, *or any one on earth* if I told you something now?"

"I promise and swear!" Fay eagerly echoed.

"By what do you 'swear'?"—with a laugh. "By the one you love best?"

"Yes," said Fay; "by the two ones I love best. Father and you."

"Oh, you put him first?"

"I—don't know," the child faltered, suddenly embarrassed. "But he—*came* to me first. He was so kind to-day—like a fairy godfather, if there is such a thing. Isn't it strange—he was kind this afternoon, and *you* are this evening! I didn't even pray about him. But I prayed about you—that I'd think of some way to get you back. And I did think of sitting in the window, so as to get ill, and ring for Nurse to send for you, please."

Sandie was extraordinarily touched. This mite hadn't "given her away" to Hugh, yet she had brooded so tragically on the fear of her loss that she'd been willing to suffer illness to bring the wanderer back!

"Well, now, I'm *sure* you deserve to hear the secret," she said, kissing the child on both cheeks. "It's this: I did—*almost*—mean to run away. I thought of it—rather than have that new woman come into the house—*my* house as much as Hugh's, for I've put a lot of money into it! And I'd have left a note for Hugh, telling him *why*. Maybe I should never have been allowed to see you again. I'm not sure I would have done all this, but I *think* I would; and it's you and your prayers—and your love—that have stopped me."

"Oh, Sandie, *thank* you for telling me that!" the

child breathed. "It's wonderful! And you *will* always stay with us, won't you?"

"I can't answer for 'always'!" said Sandie. "I will for the present. The rest depends."

But deep in her heart she knew that she was not staying only for love of the child. She was going to stay and fight Mary Ffrench no matter what Mary Ffrench's protégée might be like!

CHAPTER VI

NURSE had been given a cheque for six months' wages by Sir Hugh, and told that she might choose whether to leave when the nursery-governess came, or remain under the new incumbent's jurisdiction for a month. She had chosen the former course, but, with the cheque safe in her possession, the night's adventure brought grim change of mind to Mrs. McClellan.

She had dared to threaten Fay a little more harshly than ever before, counting confidently, as she did, upon Lady Ffrench's championship. The scene after "my lady's" unexpected return, however, warned the woman not to rely upon this prop. She feared that her butterfly mistress might not turn a deaf ear if the child told tales; and if Lady Ffrench didn't "stand by" her against Sir Hugh, as once she would have done, there might be a dangerous reckoning to-morrow. Nurse resolved, therefore, to dodge the reefs of to-morrow. She could "kill two birds with one stone," she told herself with mixed metaphors, by "wiping the dust" (if any) of the Ffrench *ménage* from her feet in advance of recriminations. First and foremost, she could "save her face" by avoiding possible expulsion. Also, she could revenge herself upon Sir Hugh for dis-

pensing with her, by inconveniencing the whole family. She was furious with every one excepting herself (even with good-natured Mrs. Jennings, who had shown comparative indifference to her impending loss) but there was a certain slight tingle of joy in preparing a surprise for the household.

Rage sustained her strength through the fatigue of night packing; and at six o'clock, before the humblest among the servants was astir for the day, Mrs. McClellan dressed for a journey, then stole softly out to summon a taxi. The promise of a big tip induced the chauffeur to mount to the first floor and carry down the largest box. The smaller luggage was already waiting in the hall, neatly piled there by herself. Soon she was gone—for ever—leaving no address, and would be out of London directly after the banks had opened and she could cash her cheque. Later, if Sir Hugh wished to stop it, let him try!

Half the woman's pleasure would have soured to chagrin, however, if she could have seen the awakening of her late charge.

Fay had been bathed and put to bed in glum silence by Nurse, for Lady Ffrench had intrusively remained present during the whole ceremony, even stopping to kiss her daughter good-night and "tuck her in." But a steely glint in the pale eyes had told the child that she was unforgiven, and she looked forward with dread to the morning. As a rule she waked early, but as she had tossed and turned without sleep till long after

midnight, it was close upon nine when the heavy eyes opened to consciousness.

On the mantel directly opposite Fay's bed was a clock with very black figures on a large white face, and a Billikin squatting on top. The uncurtained window let in all the morning light, and the child stared at the hands of the clock in surprise. Nine! And Nurse always came to get her out of bed promptly at eight! Was this change of programme a good sign, Fay wondered, or a bad one?

Most signs with Nurse were bad. The only occasions when Fay could remember her being late were those when she had been attacked in the night by a violent neuralgic headache. 'Ware Nurse at such times! Her temper then surpassed itself.

Fay's first impulse was to cower in bed and pretend to be fast asleep when Nurse did come, and to that impulse she might have yielded yesterday. But to-day was different. Her father had noticed her and taken an interest. He had promised things, and somehow Fay could not imagine his breaking a promise. He wasn't that sort! And even Sandie—Sandie *liked* her, had kissed her and defended her from Nurse. Perhaps to-day the Princess wouldn't quite have forgotten or gone back to the old ways.

Fay felt suddenly brave. Instead of lying still and waiting for the worst, she jumped up to face it. There was a book she had found in the library last week—a kind of story in verse, called "Lucille"—a very, very

old book, and Fay hadn't understood all of it. But one thing she remembered and would never forget. It was something about "grasping a nettle," and it wouldn't sting your hand as it did if you just touched it and shrank away. Once in the country Fay's legs, bare above short socks, had been badly pricked by nettles; and when she read this bit of advice by Owen Meredith she had made up her mind to seize the next nettle in her hand and see if he were right. It occurred to the child now that if she went up and peeped into Nurse's room, instead of waiting, it would be rather like "grasping a nettle."

Fay was not in the least ill, despite her adventure of last night. Indeed, she had never felt better, for she was too much excited to be tired. Almost boldly her small fingers turned the handle of Nurse's room door, and—why the bed hadn't been slept in! Nurse wasn't there, and—she must be gone for good—*very* much for good!—because all her belongings had vanished. There used to be photographs of millionaires' babies in America, (Nurse wouldn't have troubled to frame and display less important babies) and souvenirs which she had collected—small ornaments, silver toilet things, and lumpish but expensive pincushions.

It came over Fay like a warm wave of joy that Nurse was out of her life, now and for ever.

Oh, it seemed almost too wonderful to be true; and yet she was sure, quite sure, that it must be true. Perhaps there might be such a saying—though she had

never heard it—as too good *not* to be true. That was what she would like to believe, and after yesterday there was no reason why she shouldn't.

This was the moment when Mrs. McClellan's pleasure in spiting every one would have shrivelled to the size of a withered nut. Instead of being "spited," Fay, for one, was overjoyed. On the threshold between the two rooms the little, night-gowned figure jumped up and down for joy.

"Nurse has gone! Nurse has gone!" Fay sang.

The calculating woman had kept the child as helpless as possible, for the place was a very good one, and the wages high. Until yesterday she had hoped and expected to have charge of Fay for several years to come, then to be richly pensioned off and free to live without working for the rest of her life. Never had she allowed the little girl to experiment in bathing herself, or even in fastening a frock.

The idea of doing these things for herself, however, so far from being formidable to Fay, was delightful. She revelled in her new independence. It was almost like being wrecked on a desert island! What fun to turn on the taps of the bath, and try the water with your finger-tips to see when it was hot enough! She poured in a great many more bath crystals than Nurse ever allowed. Sandie insisted that they be used, because she "wouldn't be touched by a child like a nutmeg-grater"; but Nurse divided the big bottle of

lovely pink or purple granules between her charge and herself, the former coming off second-best.

What fun it was to splash as long as you liked, and not to be scrubbed so hard afterwards as nearly to tear off bits of your skin! Brushing and combing your hair was a real adventure. It took a long time, but there was plenty of time, if you didn't mind about being a little hungry—and Fay didn't mind. It was part of the desert-island adventure, and not once had she pulled her own thick, corn-coloured mane as Nurse pulled it every day—apparently enjoyed pulling it—so for a beginner she must be doing well.

Mrs. McClellan was in the habit of making herself a cup of early tea, which she drank before calling Fay, eating with it some delicious wafers from Bath, which she kept in a tin. When the child was dressed, Nurse would ring about nine o'clock for breakfast in the nursery, and instructions had been given that the big tray should not be brought until she did ring; she liked her meals hot!

Fay, hungry as she was, decided, nevertheless, not to ring. Her adventure last night and its happy ending had awakened in her spirit a new courage, a new if unconscious *initiative*. The big ribbon bow on her hair wasn't tied with the same practised skill as usual, and one or two buttons of her frock, which "did up" behind, the child had been unable to reach; but apart from these small defects she had acquitted herself with credit, and, happy enough to sing, she started down-

stairs as the grandfather clock on the landing chimed for ten.

Sandie always had her light breakfast in bed, but of Sir Hugh's habits in his brief visits to Town Fay knew nothing. She had heard Sandie say that he would be "out till all hours" last night, so probably he would be sleeping late—unless he'd already left for that mysterious "up North" which Sandie hated, where "they'd found coal." Still there could be no great harm in just peeping into the breakfast-room.

The door of it was shut, and there were no servants about. Fay turned the handle, with some difficulty, and then——

"*Hallo,* Miss Mouse!" exclaimed the voice that had made her jump yesterday among the books.

She didn't jump now. She smiled shyly and yet with confidence at Hugh, who was finishing his breakfast and a newspaper at the same time.

"I was so afraid that maybe you'd gone away!" the child exclaimed.

"If it hadn't been for you I should have been gone before this," Ffrench replied. "Don't you know I've promised to try and put your affairs in better shape? Your Aunt Mary thinks she's quite competent to choose a substitute for Nurse, and this Miss Dolarro sounds all right. But I had a sort of feeling that I'd like to have a look at her myself before it should be too late."

The inference was that his personal supervision of

the recommended nursery-governess was for the child's sake; and, in fact, that motive was uppermost in Hugh Ffrench's mind. But there were others, less well defined. For one thing, though Sandie—once so dear—had hurt and offended him, and thrown away his love and respect, dimly he didn't want Mary to humiliate her. She was his child's mother, doll-mother though she seemed. She was his wife, at least in name, and the mistress of his house.

Some day he grimly foresaw that there might be a definite parting of their ways; but they weren't parted yet, and, despite her flirtations, her defiance of his wishes, her flippant insolence that approached insult, Ffrench couldn't quite see Sandie in the part of an unfaithful wife. He was ignorant of last night's events, therefore it was not the Princess's homeward flight for love of Fay that impressed him in her favour. Nevertheless, it was vaguely due to Fay's influence that he gave Sandie the benefit of the doubt. "Sandie didn't say anything bad," the child had earnestly assured him in that mad moment when he had tried to wrest the truth from her. And, pleading for Sandie, the blue eyes gazing up to his were so like Sandie's eyes that they lent their sweet truth to the image of Sandie in his troubled brain.

There was that motive, then, underneath the resolve to "see the thing through"—not to let Mary triumph over his wife. And then—but this he really did not know himself—the photograph of Nina Dolarro,

Mary's protégée of so many accomplishments, had singularly impressed Sir Hugh Ffrench. He wondered if any human girl could look quite so much like an angel as that photograph made this one look; and, being human and young, as well as a bitterly disillusioned man, down deep within him was a camouflaged wish to meet Nina Dolarro.

Fay didn't tell her father that she had fallen out of the window and been saved from grievous injury by a policeman, that Sandie had been summoned home from the dance, and had come full of love and kindness, or that Nurse had threatened to "boil" her—Fay—in a hot bath. She would have liked to relate this story, for to her it was in every detail important and wonderful, and this delightfully changed Sir Hugh might be expected to take an interest. Indeed, having broken the news that she had not yet had breakfast, because Nurse and Nurse's belongings had vanished, Fay was about to begin the even more exciting tale. It would have been splendid to tell it while the hot food which father had rung to order for her was being prepared.

But, just as she opened her lips, a voice seemed to whisper in her ear:

"If you tell about how you went and sat in the window, you'll have to explain about your prayer, too. Then father will ask you questions, and maybe find out that Sandie was going to run away from home.

She wouldn't like him to know that, because he'd be cross with her for thinking about it. And she was pleased with you because you hadn't told him things when he asked."

That stopped the outpouring; and as the perfidious flight of Nurse had given father something new to think about, he didn't notice the oddness of a little girl suddenly shutting her mouth upon a gasp. He didn't notice, either, the sudden paleness of her cheeks.

"Beastly of the woman to sneak away and leave you in the lurch like that," Ffrench grumbled. "Of course, she hoped we couldn't get Miss Dolarro in a hurry, and that we'd be put to no end of trouble. But when you've stoked your little furnace I'll 'phone your Aunt Mary and see what can be done on the spur of the moment."

Fay hadn't been aware that she had a furnace to stoke; but apparently it was a pseudonym for the organ gaily alluded to by Sandie now and then as her "tummy." When this had been supplied with porridge and "cambric coffee," she was whisked away to the smoking-room, the one corner of the modernised old house where Hugh Ffrench had the slightest "home" feeling.

Fay was established in an immense chair where father said that she looked like a small pearl in a big oyster-shell. From the one-sided conversation which she then heard on the telephone (it seemed that you weren't "eavesdropping," and that it was all right to

listen, if people, or even one person, knew you were there!) the child learnt that Miss Dolarro was not in Town. She was staying at a country house in Surrey until she got a position, and having heard from Aunt Mary by telegram yesterday (reply paid), intended to remain with her friends until the following day, when Aunt Mary proposed calling for her with a car.

Father's answers or questions made it clear that Aunt Mary was explaining to him various circumstances. The house where Miss Dolarro visited was situated several miles from a village, and several more miles from a station. Her friends had no motor-car, which was the reason why Aunt Mary had offered to fetch the new governess and her luggage—the poor child hadn't enough possessions to fill big trunks! But Aunt Mary had important engagements for all of to-day. She couldn't possibly go till to-morrow, as originally planned. She was afraid that dear Fay must get on as best she could till then. Surely Sandie might sacrifice a little time, for once? Or, if not, there were at least several maids able to look after the child for a day and a half.

"I'll motor down to this place in the country, with Fay, and bring back Miss Dolarro and her boxes," suggested Ffrench. "I'm staying in Town to see the thing through, and I haven't made any engagements. You say Miss Dolarro has accepted the job, agreed to

the salary and everything, so she won't mind being rushed a little."

But Miss Ffrench didn't like having her own arrangements upset, once they were definitely made. She considered that she was being useful and unselfish in giving up the best part of to-morrow to the good cause of her brother's interests. She didn't wish that task of usefulness to be snatched out of her mouth, so to speak; consequently she protested.

If she was obstinate, however, her younger brother was firm. He stuck to his point, and for some reason, when she'd made him admit that he wanted to *see* Miss Dolarro, Aunt Mary suddenly yielded, with an indulgent smile, invisible through the telephone. Had Sandie been in Fay's place, hearing half that was said and guessing the rest, she would have been surer than ever that Mary Ffrench was a "regular old cat." She would have deduced from Miss Ffrench's quick surrender that the lady had realised in a flash how well her "plan" was beginning to work out. Short of any less incentive, Mary would not so readily have given up to Hugh.

Inquiries put to James produced the information that her ladyship was still asleep. The maid Hortense had orders not to disturb her ladyship until her ladyship rang. Hearing this, Ffrench refused the footman's suggestion that one of the housemaids should be called upon to dress Miss Fay for the car. Sir Hugh decided to perform these services for the child

himself; and, if Fay could have known, it was long since he had been so happy as in their laughing search together for hat and coat and tiny gloves.

Ffrench had a couple of motors in the town garage, which he drove himself. One of these was open, and the other a new type of an old make, called an "all-weather car." He chose this for the trip, on Fay's account, and also because it would take luggage.

Mary had, with sudden willingness, dropped her objections and given him the address of Miss Dolarro's friends. Two hours each way the journey would occupy, and Fay was in a silent ecstasy of joy at finding that her place was beside her father as he drove. It was wonderful to be with him, now that they were such friends!

"It's lovely, Sir Hugh," she exclaimed, "to go somewhere with you, and have you talk with me just as if —as if you'd known me all my life!"

This made him laugh out aloud; and yet, when he turned to look down into the happy, upturned face, he was struck with sadness. Perhaps he was realising that in the child's words lay more of tragedy than fun. She was seven years old, and instead of "knowing her all her life," he had known her only for one day. Even so, they had made acquaintance through mere accident. He had happened to stroll into the library where this small daughter of his was feeding her lonely mind on Shakespeare; and incidentally her father had learned that the supposed baby was an Individual, a

Personality of unknown depths and strength of character.

Whose fault was it, though, that these two had missed each other for seven important years? Was it his or Sandie's? He felt sure that it was mostly Sandie's. She hadn't given him any real love or any real home. She had driven him away by showing so plainly, so frankly, that once you were married, a husband was a bore, a hindrance, to get rid of as often as possible, so that you could have the fun of flirting with other men, not husbands.

The bitterness he had felt for Sandie yesterday, before the defence of her by that little voice and those pleading blue eyes, contracted his heart again, and it was in this mood that the car reached Beech Hill Farm, three miles from the village of Graylea St. Mary, and seven from Dorking.

Fay thought that she had never seen a more heavenly place than this farm, as the car turned in at a wide-open white gate. It was a wintry landscape, but the lovely wood that made a dark background for the old, low, white home was painted in exquisite colour against the pale-blue sky of an October afternoon. There was the dark green of many tall pines mingling with the splendid beeches which gave the farm its name, and there was the rich bronze of clinging leaves that still decorated the beeches themselves. There, too, was the opal-azure of the smoke that floated up from the rose-red chimneys, and the dull

gold of lichen on the blue-grey slates of the farmhouse roof. Fenced off from the drive on either side were softly sloping fields where the grass was still green, and in one of these fields were two Alderney cows, the colour of coffee and cream.

Fay cried out her delight for the first time since the drive began, though she had been visibly happy all the way, and the sound of irrepressible joy was pathetic to Ffrench. The sudden outburst which she could not keep in made him see, as he hadn't quite seen before, how the habit of reserve and self-repression had been growing for years upon this little creature so near, and yet till now so very far from him.

Beyond the fields, and fenced off from them, were lawns and a small garden in which the farmhouse stood. There were arches for rambler roses, and several dark yews trimmed into quaint animal shapes. There were neat, straight paths, too, cutting through among flower-beds, and in one of these paths a man and a girl were walking together, their backs to the car as it came. So narrow was the way that the pair were shoulder to shoulder, and though at first they hadn't noticed the sound of the motor, they turned abruptly, as if in great surprise, as the car stopped.

For an instant the two stood still, and Fay said to herself that they were the most beautiful people she had ever seen—just like story-book people—yes, perhaps even more beautiful than Sir Hugh and Sandie, she had to admit, though she had believed till this

minute that her father and mother surpassed anyone else on earth.

The couple wore no hats, and the sun shone on their bare heads, which were almost on the same level. The man was tall, but the girl was nearly as tall as he. Perhaps she looked even taller than she was, because of her delicate slimness. Her hair was dark, but the sun turned it red—red as new Japanese bronze, or a horse-chestnut fresh from the burr; and the man seemed to have on a bright golden helmet, so yellow, so smooth, so shining was his short hair.

The tableau of human perfection, a faultlessly handsome man and a flawlessly lovely woman, lasted only a second or two. Then the man turned away again and strode off, to vanish from sight behind the house, as if the car's arrival were no business of his. Left alone, the girl came forward, politely masking her surprise with a kind smile of welcome. Fay felt guilty of disloyalty in thinking this girl more beautiful than Sandie, when only last night she had assured the vision in white-and-silver that nothing else on earth could be so exquisite. But it just couldn't be helped!

The child glanced up at her father, and realised that he, too, was almost startled by Miss Dolarro's loveliness. Oh, there could be no doubt that the wonderful girl was Miss Dolarro, for Sir Hugh had a look on his face like surprised recognition. No wonder he had said that her photograph was "very pretty!" But she herself *must* be much prettier than the picture,

otherwise father wouldn't be astonished; he'd merely be pleased.

By this time Ffrench was out of the car, taking off his hat as he stood at the garden gate.

"Miss Dolarro?" he said, as the tall, slight figure in blue serge drew near. "My name is Ffrench. You know my sister Mary. And I've brought my little girl to help ask you a favour."

Nina Dolarro glanced from the young father to the child in white fur, who looked very small and shy in the big, dignified Rolls Royce car. She had a smile that was almost divine, Hugh thought. In fact, divine was the most appropriate adjective to express her whole personality. No old master had ever painted a Madonna who resembled this half-Italian, half-Irish girl, and none approaching her in radiance, yet she *was* like what a very young Madonna ought to be! Hugh couldn't avoid a mental comparison between her and his wife, who had been the most admired girl in her own country, as in his, a few years ago—the beautiful heiress, Melisande Morgan.

Sandie was just as adorable to look at now, when she was twenty-six, or even more so, than she had been at eighteen; but he had told himself long ago that she simply hadn't been meant for a wife and mother.

This tall, calm girl, on the contrary, seemed made to be both. He couldn't imagine her flirting with a lot of silly boys or men, and being frivolous all day

long. As soon think of haloed Saint Cecilia grinning at her organ! She had immense brown eyes, with long lashes that were black at the roots and coppery gold at the curled-up ends. Her brows were softly arched and dark, her forehead low and broad, with a sweet little point in the middle where the wonderful hair grew down—hair drawn straight back, not bobbed, but waving in silky ripples like water brushed by a summer breeze. In contrast with the dark brows, this beautiful hair was almost auburn red in the afternoon light, but Hugh imagined that at night it would hold dusky, purple shadows.

The rather long, oval face, with its delicately pointed chin, was healthily pale, with a magnolia whiteness, and the small mouth, with full lips that turned down wistfully at the corners, was red. The best part of all this beauty was, too, that it appeared to be entirely a gift of Nature, not art.

Remembering Sandie as she had flung angry, cruel words at him yesterday, her eyes of sapphire blue, flashing under charming, touched-up lashes, the very smartness of her dress and impudent little hat flaunting defiance, Ffrench felt that his wife was of a chocolate-box type of beauty compared to this wonderful girl who would be no more than a superior servant in the house. Would Sandie tolerate such a dangerous Cinderella, even in silent, unconscious rivalry? he wondered.

CHAPTER VII

AS Fay sat still, awed by her intense admiration, the girl opened the gate and listened sweetly to Sir Hugh Ffrench's explanation.

"Why, of course, I will go back with you to-day!" she said; and her voice was just right for her face—soft, low, rather deep; many tones deeper than Sandie's tones, which Fay had heard likened to "heather honey." Her English was perfect, but there was a faint, alluring hint in it of Latin origin. "The only trouble is," she went on; "but—no, there is not any real trouble at all, if you can wait just a little while I pack in a hurry. I'm staying with a friend, Mrs. Harkness, an American lady, to whom Mr. Andrews, of Beech Hill Hall, has lent this house. It used to be a farmhouse, you know, but he uses it now for guests. Margot—Mrs. Harkness—will want you and this darling pet that I'm to take care of, to lunch with her, if you will. Do say 'Yes!' It's nearly luncheon time now, I think, and——"

Ffrench broke in to say that he wouldn't wish to bother Mrs. Harkness. He'd meant to break his news to Miss Dolarro, and spin back with Fay to the village inn, which he had passed en route, thus giving time

for all preparations to be made before he had to return and carry her off.

As he tried to excuse himself, however, Miss Dolarro's glorious eyes expressed disappointment, and Hugh found himself wondering if she could possibly imagine that he declined through snobbishness—that he didn't wish to begin an acquaintance with his daughter's nursery-governess by sitting at table with her friends on terms of social equality?

He felt the blood rush to his face at the very thought, which was so monstrous, and at the same time so absurd. Why, the girl was more like a young queen in exile than a nursery-governess—proud, yet sweetly simple in the way that only people of high birth and breeding are simple. Besides, Mary had told him yesterday that Miss Dolarro was the daughter of an Italian noble and an Irish girl of "good connections" (a favourite word of Mary's); that her parents' story was a great romance which she—Mary—had promised the friend who had introduced Nina to keep secret. Now that Ffrench saw Miss Dolarro, he could well believe in this "great romance."

Everything about her suggested romance, even her present environment, and the extreme plainness of the blue serge frock which somehow emphasised her beauty. He wasn't "falling in love" in the very least. The idea didn't even occur to him, though Sandie had been cheating him of love and romance for years, and, "man's man" though he was by type, he needed

both, as all men do, whether hotly conscious of their need or not. Still he did feel the allure of this girl of the South, who had something of the siren in her as well as the saint. Rather than be misunderstood by her in such a dreadful way, he would put a dozen Mrs. Harknesses to all the trouble in the world!

If Miss Dolarro had been disappointed by her employer's half-spoken refusal, so had Fay, and the child was delighted when Hugh reconsidered. It was a delicious excitement to be lifted out of the car, and led hand-in-hand by Miss Dolarro (who had perfect hands, like those pale hands at Shalimar Sandie sang of) along one of those dear little narrow paths, to a funny porch with a seat on each side of the door.

Inside the door was a hall or a room—Fay didn't quite know which—with a queer, tucked-away staircase at the back. The floor was made of red tiles, and there were two or three deerskin rugs upon it. On the whitewashed wall were the antlered heads of these very deer perhaps, and a few water-colour sketches—women's faces, men's faces—framed in black wood.

Although Fay was far too young to criticise the merits or demerits of pictures, she had so strong a feeling for beauty that Nature had made her a judge. Her eyes travelled admiringly from one framed sketch to another, and stopped at the smallest and best of all.

"Why, it's *you!*" she exclaimed involuntarily, and as the words spoke themselves she felt Miss Dolarro's hand twitch, then tighten on hers. Glancing up at

her companion's face, she saw that it was bathed in a rosy blush. Father's eyes were upon it, too, just for a second, but tactfully they returned to its painted copy on the wall.

"Oh yes," exclaimed the lovely voice. "Mr. Andrews is so kind, he has let Margot bring a few of her own things to stick about here and there in the house. and make her feel at home. That—these pictures are hers."

"Is Mrs. Harkness an artist?" Ffrench politely inquired.

"Oh, no, she didn't paint these things. They're only her property," explained Miss Dolarro. Then, raising her voice, she called: "Margot—Margot—are you there? Sir Hugh Ffrench has come, and I've been telling him that the sketch of me on the walls belongs to you."

She had hardly finished this long-distance introduction, so to speak, when a red portière slid back from a doorway that led to another room. In the doorway a lady appeared, evidently the lady addressed, for she said:

"How do you do? This is a pleasant surprise, Sir Hugh. You and this dear child are just in time for lunch."

She was short and fattish, neither old nor young, but it was clear that she wished to look attractive, for her hair—a curious dark, metallic red which interested Fay very much—was elaborately done, with

many waves, and a braid wound across her forehead. Her purple dress seemed more suited to town than country, so perhaps she wasn't an out-of-doors person like Miss Dolarro; and somehow her complexion was more suited to town, too, though Fay hardly knew why this thought jumped into her head. Maybe, though, it was because some of Sandie's less youthful friends had complexions like that, rather hard-looking, like pink-and-white iced cakes.

Those ladies always smoked a good deal when they came to see Sandie, but this lady, Mrs. Harkness, wasn't smoking. When Hugh and Fay had been invited into the next room, however, there was a smell of cigarette-smoke there, quite a strong smell, mixed with the fragrance of the gorgeous red roses in a crystal bowl which adorned a round table laid for luncheon.

Fay loved flowers and she noticed these roses particularly, because they were like the roses which came to Sandie nearly every day from some one who knew her tastes. They couldn't grow here in the garden, because it was almost winter, and such roses didn't live out of doors, Fay had been told, except in summer. Some one must have sent them to Miss Dolarro or Mrs. Harkness—perhaps that wonderfully handsome young man who had disappeared like a dream-person the first instant she had looked at him. He and Miss Dolarro had been so beautiful together for that instant that Fay hoped now to see him again. Perhaps

he was coming to lunch. Anyhow, there were three places laid on the pretty white table.

As Fay's eyes observed this detail, and dwelt upon the roses, Miss Dolarro was looking at the table, too. She smiled at the child.

"You love flowers, don't you, dear?" she said. "So do I, but I couldn't afford such beauties as these, if I had a house in the country lent to me! Isn't it good that Mrs. Harkness *can?* She has the house, and the roses, too! Margot, dear, I see you must have forgotten to tell your nice maid—or else she forget that you *did* tell her!—about Mr. Andrews bringing you word that the vicar couldn't come, after all. Now we shall need only one more place laid—for dear little Fay, and she shall sit by me. May I run and say to Parsons that she can put the other place—and that then you'll be ready to begin luncheon?"

Fay wondered if Mr. Andrews, who owned Beech Hill Hall and the farm, was the beautiful young man with hair like a gold helmet. If so, she was sorry that he had gone. Hugh was also thinking about Mr. Andrews, as it happened. Hadn't he heard something about a fellow named Andrews who owned a place in Surrey? What was it? he asked himself. Surely there was something—something rather odd. Paul, yes, Paul Andrews was the name of that one. Could this chap be the same?

Hugh Ffrench had been imagining, while Fay had hoped, that the young man seen for a moment in the

garden would be Mrs. Harkness's guest at luncheon. Hugh's curiosity had been aroused by the man's good looks and sudden disappearance from the scene. He couldn't help wondering if he were Mr. Andrews, the owner of the quaint old house, and the "Hall," of which Miss Dolarro had spoken.

The words so simply dropped by the girl to her hostess, however, assured him of the man's identity, and at the same time explained Andrews's morning errand at the farm. If Miss Dolarro had wished her new employer to know that *she* wasn't the object of Mr. Andrews's visit—though they had been seen together—she could hardly have informed him more skilfully. It was impossible, however, to associate even the most innocent diplomacy with that saintly face of hers. She gave the impression of being crystal clear, all the way through to her soul!

When they had sat down at the round table with its red rose decoration, Hugh was vaguely glad that Andrews wasn't present. The two ladies made much of Fay, as they couldn't have done with a man other than the child's father in the circle. In fact, most of the conversation revolved around Fay, although, apropos of her new charge, Miss Dolarro volunteered bits of information concerning pupils she had had in her past—quite a brief past, for it came out casually that she wasn't yet twenty-three years old.

"My mother died in Italy, when I was a child," she said, "and my father when I was seventeen. He'd

given me a good education, luckily, though he was an invalid for a long time, and I was practically his nurse. There was hardly any money left when he went—most of what he'd had died with him. So I was obliged to go out into the world and earn my living. My first place was in France. I was companion to a girl about my own age, who wasn't quite right in her head. It was quite dreadful, but it taught me self-control and also I perfected my French. After a year she died, and I had two dear little Russian pupils, in Paris. That experience ended—in rather a horrid adventure, but it wasn't my fault, and the countess gave me good credentials." (Miss Dolarro's distressed look and blush made Hugh guess that some one had made love to her who had no right to make love; but *of course,* it wasn't "her fault!" Poor, beautiful child, what could you expect, with that face, those eyes? He felt very chivalrous and sympathetic towards her.)

"At that house I met a good many Americans—it was in Paris, two years after the Armistice, and a rich family took me with them to Washington," she said. "That was where I met Mrs. Harkness, and we made up a great friendship. I might have been in America still, if it hadn't been for her! I got a little homesick for Italy, you see, and she invited me to travel with her, and come here to England afterwards. She knew Mr. Andrews—he was an old friend—they'd met in travelling. Wasn't that it, Margot?"

Margot, who seemed to like listening to the girl's lovely voice said, "Yes, that was it." She and Paul Andrews had been pals for ages.

"Paul Andrews!" echoed Ffrench. Suddenly the story he had been trying to recall flashed on to the screen of his memory. "I've heard——" he hesitated, because Andrews and Mrs. Harkness were friends. "I've heard—his name mentioned."

Miss Dolarro looked at Mrs. Harkness, and Mrs. Harkness decided to defend her host of Beech Hill Farm, though he had not yet been attacked.

"There was a lot of gossip about him over here, I understand," she remarked, "because he went to America—both North and South—when war broke out instead of going to France. But, naturally, *he'd offered* himself and been turned down! He has a very queer heart, poor boy, though he looks so strong. Nearly all the money he made in America, painting portraits of the fashionable beauties (and he made a *heap*) he gave to the Red Cross; so he did as much for his country by his work as he could have done by fighting. He was almost more generous, I know, than he could afford to be, for he's very far from rich, except what he earns by his art. He lets Beech Hill Hall and this little house in summer. It's only in winter than he can live here himself. He used to get up beautiful entertainments, too, over on our side, in the war, for the benefit of the soldiers. Oh, he *did* work hard, I assure you."

"He must have done," Hugh agreed politely. He had heard that this Paul Andrews, the artist (known to friends of his own at a more or less Bohemian club), had been in a "blue funk," and "skipped" to the States at the time when men who hadn't yet joined up were swept into the war by compulsion. He'd heard also that the fellow had turned actor over there, and made a success as a sort of "matinée idol," both on the stage and the screen. He remembered all the club talk now!

Perhaps, as Mrs. Harkness said, it had been no more than gossip, and her story of Andrews's American activities was the true version. Still, Hugh didn't feel enthusiastic about the handsome young vanisher in the garden, and he was pleased, somehow, that Paul Andrews should be Mrs. Harkness's pal, not Nina Dolarro's.

"Paul is a darling to lend me this sweet little place!" Miss Dolarro's hostess went on. "I wanted to pay rent, but he wouldn't allow me to, so I came anyway. I'd had a bad case of 'flu' and it was *such* a chance to have dear Nina nurse me back to health in lovely, quiet surroundings like these. She's a perfect nurse, Sir Hugh. She didn't tell you that she did some fine war nursing in Paris, but I will! And then there was her poor father——"

"There's one thing I *forgot* to tell," Nina Dolarro broke in, smiling under the storm of compliments, "but maybe you know, Sir Hugh, that my father and your sister, Miss Ffrench, were acquainted with each other

years ago? That is why she has been so kind to me. She sent me money once when I was in great trouble, and has kept track of me ever since. I knew she would help me find something in England—something that I should *love* to do—and she *has!* England is going to be very good to me, after my French and American experiences."

Bending her head, with its heavy, red-brown braids, she left a kiss on Fay's corn-coloured hair. Hugh thought that the child's face and the lovely young woman's made a touchingly beautiful picture, seen together. Strange that this girl should have the instinct of motherhood, which Sandie seemed wholly to lack! But then, Sandie was a butterfly. He wasn't quite sure yet what Miss Dolarro was. Anyhow, it was something singularly sincere and sweet!

Sir Hugh Ffrench was offered cigarettes by Mrs. Harkness after luncheon, and while he smoked, and lingered a little over a cup of very good black coffee, Miss Dolarro packed. It was surprising to him how soon she finished! He was sure that, if Sandie could have accomplished such a task at all without Hortense, she would have been hours over it. It proved to him that his daughter's new governess was practical and efficient, as well as beautiful, that she should be ready to start in little more than half an hour.

Fay had been invited to go upstairs and watch the packing, if it would amuse her, and the child had decided that it would amuse her very much. There had

been no time yet for Miss Dolarro to inquire into her charge's store of knowledge up-to-date, and the new governess had no idea what big words the small, quiet creature could read and digest. She allowed Fay to "help" by bringing books from table and mantelpiece, to put into the bottom of a trunk. Most of these were French novels, and though Fay knew no French save a few words she had picked up from Hortense, Sandie's Parisian maid, she recognised several titles on the yellow paper covers as having been seen before.

Her mother had a number of the same books, and she had heard Sandie telling Hortense to throw some of them away—they were too disgusting. Though she liked a *piquant* style, she drew the line at loathsomeness. Hortense had taken the novels, but hadn't thrown them away. She read them in her own room, where she smoked a secret collection of her mistress's monogrammed cigarettes.

It struck Fay as strange that such a sweet girl as Miss Dolarro should not only have these "disgusting" books, but be packing them up to carry away with her. Perhaps, though, the child told herself, Miss Dolarro's idea of "disgusting" and "loathsome" things are quite different from Sandie's. They two were so different. Fay realised that never had women been more different, one from the other, than were her mother and her new governess. . . . Besides, Miss Dolarro was Italian.

There were other possessions, too, which would, any-

how, have surprised Mrs. McClellan, the austere, the rigid—lovely thin nighties and tea-gowns as beautiful as Sandie's; film-like silk stockings; a little very original looking jewellery; a silver manicure set, and pots that had the air of containing face-powder and rouge —pots like those gold-topped, turquoise-studded ones that stood about on Sandie's dressing-table, though these had mere silver tops, not gold. Of course, they *weren't* for rouge or powder, though, because you'd only to look at Miss Dolarro to see that she used nothing of the sort on her sweet face.

As for Sandie, she loved powder and lip-stick, and rouged whenever she happened to have "one of her pale days." She touched up her eyelashes, too, in the evenings. Fay had seen her do it—but they were left natural by day as a rule, and they were long and thick, and quite dark enough to make a contrast with her hair, when they had been let alone.

Miss Dolarro had given the child a Japanese doll "mascot" and some little animal ornaments to play with, also some things she called "toys," but which (Fay knew well enough, from seeing the same sort in her mother's rooms) were in reality "favours" from gay luncheons, dinners and dances. The child was glad that Miss Dolarro had these pretty trifles. She must have *some* fun, then, now and then, though when hearing her talk at luncheon it sounded as if her life had been all work and no play. The lovely lady had no idea that, with her possessions scattered about,

there was a "chiel amang 'em, takin' notes." She thought Fay was a petted baby who would not notice grown-up people's things, and wouldn't remember what her big, blue eyes did unconsciously absorb.

There was a large box of chocolates, too, which Miss Dolarro covered up rather hastily and packed without asking Fay to sample the contents; but then, the child had no doubt that this was because Miss Dolarro, like Nurse, disapproved of children eating sweets.

Judging from the books and ornaments, Miss Dolarro might have been staying a long time with Mrs. Harkness; yet this couldn't be so, for Fay had heard Miss Dolarro tell Sir Hugh that they'd been only a fortnight in the house. Fay supposed that, at all events, she had *meant* to stay a long time.

There was a bowl of red roses on a writing-table in Miss Dolarro's room, just like the splendid one downstairs in the dining-room sitting-room, and quite as many roses in the bowl, if not more—which showed how good Mrs. Harkness was to her companion, giving her such expensive presents.

Just before starting, Miss Dolarro took two or three of the great, crimson blooms out of the water, and made as if to pin them on her belted, blue-serge coat. But before they were affixed the girl changed her mind. Reluctantly she thrust the roses back into the bowl with the rest. Then: "Now we can start if you like, darling," she said, taking Fay's hand.

Fay felt that she ought to love this beautiful being very much. No woman had ever been so sweet to her, so gently affectionate. And so she *did* love her! But oh, Sandie, Sandie, with her whimsical way and April moods of sun and storm! If only she could be governess and nurse, as well as mother! Fay realised too clearly, however, that Sandie wouldn't like that at all!

Sandie was deliberately out when Hugh brought Miss Dolarro home, but it was with difficulty that she remained out long enough to accomplish the object of showing her complete indifference to the new arrangement he had made.

She had, in any case, an evening appointment—dinner and dancing at Claridge's—*not* with Derek Leavenworth, because, as she had "let him down" last night (in his phraseology), she'd thought it wise not to begin encouraging him again *quite* so soon!

Before he could call her up on the 'phone, early in the morning after the Woolworth dance fiasco, she summoned to the rescue a man who was her "stand-by," on whom she had bestowed the appropriate pet-name of "S.O.S." Captain Western, a man of forty (forty was almost old to Sandie), never accepted an evening engagement until he was sure that Lady Ffrench didn't want him for one thing or another, if she were in Town. That is to say, he adored her as unselfishly as a man can adore a woman, and Sandie

never scrupled to make use of his adoration. He was unique, and most serviceable!

But she honestly thought that he ought to be grateful and happy just to be granted a little of her society when it suited her to give it.

You see, his nose rather turned up, and he had blunt features! He wasn't particularly smart or particularly rich—consequently quite a different type from most of the men she knew.

Still, he *was* a man, and, having asked him to get a table at Claridge's for eight o'clock, even he—on the principle that a worm will turn—might object if she failed him at the last minute. Therefore, when Sandie came in from *thé dansant* at six o'clock, it was annoying to learn from Hortense that Sir Hugh, Fay and the governess hadn't yet arrived. She had wanted to hear all about the new creature without having time to see her that night; thus could she, without losing anything, have shown Hugh how little he had hurt her by leaving her to sleep, unconsulted, that morning.

There wasn't much time to go out again and stay out, because Sandie liked to have at least an hour to bathe and dress for dinner. No matter how hard she had danced, or shopped, or played bridge, or flirted through an afternoon, a hot bath with a whole bottle of special eau-de-Cologne in it, as well as rose crystals, invariably toned her up again for the evening and a late night, making her feel like a goddess. She didn't

wish to miss the delightful tonic this time, of all other times, because, for some reason which she hadn't cared to analyse, Sandie had not felt up to her usual high pitch of vitality and liveliness that day.

Through everything it had been as though—if she would only stop to listen—a gloomy, reproachful voice had something to say to her. But she wouldn't stop to listen. She hated gloomy, reproachful voices speaking, inside or out, and no such voice had a right to scold her, anyhow. She was as good as gold—much better than Hugh Ffrench deserved, and much better than she would be, but for Fay—that singularly appealing, clinging Fay whom she had cuddled naked in her arms last night.

Well, in spite of the hour, she *did* go out again! She was determined to go out and be out when Hugh's car came back. The only thing she could think of to do at such short notice was to run in for a surprise chat with the pal who lived nearest, and that pal chanced to be Lady Beatrice Briggs.

The one objection to Bee, in the peculiar circumstance, was—that she happened to be Derek Leavenworth's sister, married to a rather negligible Major Briggs. Bee thought Derek irresistible, and didn't want Sandie to resist him, because she hated to have the "darling old thing" thwarted in any of his heart's desires. This was awkward, as matters stood at the moment.

However, Bee lived only three minutes away, on

foot, and Sandie had dismissed her car till seven-forty. So to Bee's she went, and Derek was there, as she'd been half afraid, half hopeful, he would be. She didn't exactly *love* Derek. As she'd told him frankly yesterday, she didn't love any one desperately—she *thought*—except herself. But he was a *very* exciting person, consequently rather fun and distinctly dangerous. Her conscience—or what she'd trained herself to believe was conscience—approved her for making an evening engagement with another man—a very different man!—so it wasn't, perhaps, a killing matter if she did meet Derek in his sister's house.

At a quarter of seven, just as Sandie was getting a little restless, in spite of—or because of—Derek, she was wanted on the telephone.

Luckily, such an instrument existed in every important room in Lady Beatrice Briggs's little house. In Bee's boudoir, where the three were smoking and talking (Sandie wouldn't let Bee go out of the room for a moment), there was a ballet-danced covered 'phone close to Lord Derek's elbow as he sat near his sister's desk.

"Your maid speaking, Princess," he announced. "Says you told her to call you up here——"

"I did," Sandie confessed.

"All she says is, *'They've arrived,'* and that's what you wanted to know. Now she's hung up again—gone away."

Sandie rose.

"Yes, that's exactly what I wanted to know, and the news is only just in time, for I've got to run away home and dress."

Lord Derek was on his feet, also. No use telling him not to come. He would have come in spite of her, and Sandie rather liked him because she knew that well.

On the way home, though she hadn't quite meant to mention it, Leavenworth got the whole grievance out of her. After being so *good* last night and giving up everything, what was her reward from her husband? Of course, she'd slept a little late this morning, after all that emotion—emotion about *Fay* she meant; *nothing* else! When she awoke, there was a short note scribbled in pencil from Hugh to announce that Nurse had left, and he'd taken Fay down into Surrey in his car, to bring back the nursery-governess, or whatever one called her—anyhow, the creature she—Sandie—had told Derry about last night.

"Nina Dolarro her name is," Sandie finished—"an actress sort of name—and she's supposed to be half Italian."

"Nina Dolarro!" Leavenworth echoed.

Sandie caught him up promptly.

"Why do you repeat the woman's name like that? Surely you never heard of her or met her, did you?"

Lord Derek Leavenworth hesitated for a second or two, scarcely long enough to be noticeable, for he was a "quick thinker" when interested, as he was now.

As a matter of fact, he had both heard of and met a Miss Dolarro, supposed to be Italian, in America, when he had been in Washington and New York, visiting rich American friends, something over a year ago—just before he had met Lady Ffrench.

He couldn't be sure what the girl's first name had been, for he hadn't known her as well as he would have liked at that time, but he rather thought it had been Nina. It didn't seem likely that such a girl could have become a nursery-governess. Why should she give up an exciting career for a mere dull existence? Still, she might not have been so successful as she had seemed, or one of a dozen things might have happened, and the resemblance of the name was certainly odd. He had only to see the girl to be sure, one way or the other, and if it should be *that* one, what ought he to do?

If he hadn't been in love with Lady Ffrench and if he hadn't hoped still that later she'd go away with him, though for the present she was sticking to her child, he would doubtless have spoken out what was in his mind, if only for the idle pleasure of telling the story—such as it was. But if the Dolarro girl he'd met in the States and the new governess Hugh Ffrench was bringing into the house were one and the same, it would in the end be a jolly good thing for him. He saw this fact in half a second, and in the other half —before he answered Sandie's question—decided to "lie low."

Give *that* girl (if it should by luck turn out to be that girl) a chance with Sandie's Sir Galahad of a husband, and there'd soon be "something doing," in the *ménage*—precisely what he wanted and hadn't been able to bring about last night.

"No-o," he replied calmly, "I don't remember ever hearing of any one of that name. I was just thinking it was a fancy sort of a name for a nursery-governess—a sort of upper servant, that's all."

"An upper servant she *is,* and an upper servant I mean to make her stay, in spite of Hugh's orders," said Sandie, "whether she calls herself a 'lady' or not—and even though she is a protégée of the admirable Mary's!"

By this time they had arrived at the Ffrenchs' house, and Sandie was about to send her companion away, but he begged to come in, if only for a moment.

"You promised to lend me that book of Walter de la Mare's poetry, with some verses in it that seemed like *us,*" he said. "Give me just a minute more, as another man is going to have you all the evening. Not that Claridge's isn't free to the public. If you don't let me in now, I shall certainly turn up there. And I may do that anyhow, I warn you."

Sandie thought almost as quickly as Leavenworth had thought. Hugh disliked Derry, and hated his coming to the house. But *she* hated this Dolarro person coming to the house! If she were defying Hugh, he was defying her just as thoroughly and disagree-

ably. She hoped Hugh would see Derek, and understand how little she cared about his "grousing." She supposed that at least she had a right to lend a friend a book!

"All right," she consented. "Just for a minute, then."

She opened the door with her latchkey, and they went in together.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE were two reasons for the long delay in Hugh's return with Fay and Miss Dolarro in the car.

They had left Beech Hill Farm before three o'clock, and the drive to town should not have taken more than two hours; but they had had a breakdown, owing to some obscure carburetor trouble which Hugh wasn't skilled mechanic enough to locate and repair in a short time. This held them up on the road for nearly an hour; but, though the autumn twilight fell, Fay was in no hurry to get on.

She and Miss Dolarro (who asked the child to call her "Nina"), walked up and down the road, within sight of the car, stopping now and then for a cheerful word with Sir Hugh. Nina told her stories, too, the most beautiful fairy-stories that Fay had ever even imagined, all about Irish and Italian fairies, who seemed much more thrilling than the German kind, in Grimm.

At last the car could travel again, and Hugh apologised for upsetting the tea-hour.

"I ought to have landed you at home about five," he said, "but it's that now, and we won't get into town for another hour, at least. What would you two like

to do—go straight on, or stop somewhere *en route* for tea?"

"Don't you *mind,* Sir Hugh, one way or the other, which we do?" asked Nina gently, in the lovely voice which could make most men feel that they didn't "mind" anything, so long as she liked it, and gave them her society.

Ffrench replied that he didn't mind in the least. He'd dedicated this whole day to fetching his daughter's governess home. He had fixed up no engagements.

"Well, then, could we run straight on to Town, but, instead of going to your house, stop for just a *few* minutes at dear Miss Ffrench's? That is, if darling Fay doesn't feel too tired, or impatient to get home?" Miss Dolarro pleaded.

Fay would have been impatient to get home if she had thought that there was the least hope of a chat with the Princess; but, as Hugh would have expressed it, of that there "wasn't an earthly."

"I don't mind a bit going to Aunt Mary's," the child said resignedly. A visit there was always a question of resignation rather than bubbling joy, for it was very, very dull at Aunt Mary's, and sometimes she asked you questions about your Catechism, or bleak things like that. Still, Miss Dolarro wanted to see Aunt Mary, and even *loved* her, judging from what she said—though it seemed difficult to imagine any

one really *loving* Aunt Mary, and liking to be with her.

"Neither do I mind," repeated Hugh. "So that's that! We'll go. Mary will give us tea."

Yes, there was *one* nice quality Aunt Mary had! She did give you toasted muffins, and lovely short-bread, also cream—much better things than Nurse McClellan had ever permitted Fay to have at home. If there was cake Nurse ate it herself, and said it was too rich for little girls; it spoilt their appetite for supper.

Aunt Mary lived in a rather large house—what Hugh laughing called a "middle-aged" house, without the charm of age (which his own house had) or the fresh beauty of youth. It was mid-Victorian, for it had been left to Mary Ffrench by her maternal grandmother, and everything in it, even the atmosphere, was mid-Victorian, too. A mid-Victorian-looking butler opened the door and ushered the guests into a mid-Victorian drawing-room with round islands of roses floating on a green sea of carpet. There at a mid-Victorian desk sat Miss Ffrench, dictating something about mothers' meetings and red flannel petticoats (if Fay understood correctly) to a depressed, or at any rate repressed, female secretary.

Mary rose to welcome the arrivals, and her face lit with extraordinary pleasure at sight of Nina Dolarro. Hugh thought, in surprise, that he had never

seen his sister's rather heavy, dark features light up like that.

"So, then," he told himself, "the girl has charm for women as well as for men."

He was glad of this, and hoped sincerely that Miss Dolarro might charm Sandie. It would be a very good thing all round if she did. But somehow he doubted it.

Fay knew that Aunt Mary was immensely good. Every one said she was good. Father said it, and so did Sandie, though in quite a different tone. Nurse had said so, and various other persons. Besides, Aunt Mary herself behaved as if she believed that she was extremely good, and as if she expected others to believe it. But there was a queer little, half-formed conviction in the child's mind—deep down in that place where she made up her own opinions—that Aunt Mary hadn't originally been meant to be so intensely good as she was now.

She had a strange, wild look in her dark eyes sometimes, but generally it was gone again before any one not so observant as a lonely child would have noticed. Now, when she saw Miss Dolarro that look came. If she had been a man, it would have seemed that she was "in love" with the beautiful girl. The look made Fay wonder, because the child had no key to the past, and could not see into that shut room of Mary Ffrench's memories.

Miss Ffrench had finished tea, but she ordered

more, with all those buns and cakes, and that cream, which Fay liked. They chatted pleasantly for a while, and then, when Hugh announced at last that it was time to go, Aunt Mary said:

"I would be glad to have a few words with Nina alone. I'll take her away, and bring her back soon."

"Some good advice to give," thought Hugh, with a whimsical smile. "Poor Miss Dolarro! It's sure to be dismal."

But Fay's guess came nearer the truth.

"Aunt Mary's going to say things to Miss Dolarro about *Sandie!*" she thought; and she felt anxious, in an unchildlike, grown-up way that she herself was quite unable to understand.

The two women—Aunt Mary and Nina Dolarro—were gone from the drawing-room only a few minutes, as the elder woman had promised, but Miss Ffrench (who had no "den" or boudoir of her own) led her protégée upstairs to a big, austere bedroom. There she turned on all the electric lights and gazed with yearning, affectionate admiration at the girl's beautiful face.

"My dear, you are as like *him* as a woman can be like a man," she said. "I feel I know you so well, through your letters, and the photograph you've sent me, although I've seen you only once before, all those years ago! Let me see—it must have been in June, 1914, wasn't it—when you were almost a child,

seventeen years old? But you haven't changed a day since, not a day!"

"I try not to change, dear, dear Miss Ffrench," replied Nina. "You see, for the sake of *business* (for I wouldn't tell fibs for vanity, truly!) I pass myself off as only twenty-two. People like to have quite young girls, not much more than just of age, to teach their children. I've found that everywhere. It's not much harm, such a little deceit, is it?"

"I suppose not," granted Miss Ffrench indulgently, "though I make a point to be strictly truthful myself. Still, even I don't blurt out certain things which others have no business to know. For instance, I hardly need tell you that I don't go about chatting of my old happy—let us call it *friendship*—with your father."

"You were the only woman who made any real impression on his life," Nina assured her. "He was always talking about you to me, that is, after my mother died. Though he never loved her, I'm afraid, nor she him in the *true* way, he was too fine a gentleman to speak of his love for another woman, to her *daughter,* until after she had left this world. *Then*—but I told you all about that in the first letter I ever wrote you—the letter father made me promise to write before he died."

"I'm thankful he did make you, and that you kept the promise," said Miss Ffrench warmly. "Ever since, the thought that I was able to do something for *his* daughter has been a bright spot in my life. I don't

keep all your pretty photographs about the house, as I should like to do, for it might raise questions and cause gossip. They're far too striking to pass unnoticed. But the one I have framed on my desk in the drawing-room is a comfort to me every day when I sit writing or dictating there. It brings back to my heart such memories of my one romance!

"Hugh was much impressed with it yesterday, I could see. He has been in Yorkshire, at Harlow Wood, so much lately that I don't think he has called here till then, since that photograph came to me. Or, anyhow, he hasn't come nearer my desk than the fireplace." Miss Dolarro didn't speak and Aunt Mary burst out again.

"Oh, if only I could have brought you into his life before it was *too late!* I might then have had you in my own family. But just at the time when you first wrote Hugh was already infatuated with—with —I *must* say it!—the worthless golden butterfly he married. 'Golden' I call her, but the gold is not in her heart. It is all in her pocket-book—or, rather, her bank. And Hugh didn't need the money. He could have afforded to marry a girl without a penny. This marriage has been and is a tragedy, my dear, I assure you. A tragedy!"

"How very sad!" breathed Nina dutifully.

"Sad, indeed, not only for poor Hugh himself—who has become practically estranged from his home by Melisande's flirtations—but for the child, who

might as well—might *even better,* from some points of view—be motherless. Any day a scandal may break out."

"That does seem cruel," murmured the girl, "for Sir Hugh is so charming, and so young still, with all his life before him to be happy in, if only he had the chance!"

"He will have the chance, in the eyes of the world if not in the eyes of the church, provided he is obliged to divorce Melisande," said Mary. "On principle, I don't approve of divorce. I have even turned the cold shoulder to divorced couples very highly placed in the world. But Hugh is my only brother, and so much younger than I that I've been almost like a mother to him ever since I grew up, both our parents being dead. Indeed, if I hadn't had Hugh to think of at the time when your father and I—but we won't talk of that!

"Melisande is so *entirely* unsuited to him—always has been. She brings out all that's worst in Hugh, I've often felt; and it can't be good, *can't* be right, for a hot-blooded young man to be bound to a woman like that! He might even, on great provocation, kill her and some man who compromised her hopelessly. Such things do happen."

"Alas, yes!" agreed Nina. "Doesn't Sir Hugh love Lady Ffrench any more?"

"We have, of course, never discussed that subject," said Mary Ffrench. "But I have grown to

believe that love for the impertinent little piece of frivolity is dead in him. I felt surer than ever of this yesterday, when he came to me, in a mood of suppressed fury asking me to find a governess for Fay as soon as possible. Naturally, I thought of you, my child, as you said you wouldn't refuse a post as governess or companion in some family where you might meet people worth meeting, and have a chance of bettering yourself in life."

"That sounds rather selfish and mercenary when I hear my own words repeated!" the girl exclaimed with a sad little smile. "But, indeed, I didn't *mean* them to be so. I'm like Becky Sharp in just *one* way, and one only—I have to be 'my own mamma.' I have to think of my future. I knew your influence could place me with people who would treat me as an equal, and——"

"Melisande isn't likely to treat you as an equal," Miss Ffrench broke in, to warn the girl.

Nina Dolarro's lovely face (so calm, so saintly, yet with its strange allure of the eternal feminine) changed slightly, despite an effort to hide disappointment.

"Is Lady Ffrench a snob?" she inquired.

"No-o. Snobbishness is one of the few faults she isn't afflicted with, I think," replied Miss Ffrench. "But she won't enjoy having a young girl in the house, more beautiful, more accomplished, more attractive in every way, and better educated than herself. She'll

certainly snub you and 'keep you in your place,' as she will call what she'll attempt to do."

Nina looked exquisitely meek.

"Well, already I've fallen in love with little Fay. I feel as if I could bear anything for her sake. And I *will.* Though I did hope——"

Miss Ffrench took fire for the girl in her protection.

"You had every *right* to hope!" she exclaimed. "You have the right to expect the best. You ought to marry a man who can give you money—yes, a title, too, and an entrée to the best society in England. There isn't a woman in this country more beautiful than you, and your birth—on one side——"

Nina laughed desolately.

"The less said about that the better, don't you think, dearest Miss Ffrench? But I have my dreams, my ambitions. Not that I'm vain. But I feel I *could* hold my own with women who have been put above me by fortune. I feel I could make the right man happy. I'd like to have money and power and a *name,* so that I might be able to help others—as you do. But though I've had *lots* of love offered me—too much!—it's never been the right sort. Either the men were insignificant, or else—they didn't want *marriage.* Oh, Miss Ffrench, I've been almost wishing today that I hadn't come into your brother's life. He's—he's just my ideal man! Would it be awful for me if I made a fool of myself and fell in love with him?"

Mary Ffrench's face flushed a dark red. For a

moment she looked young, and singularly like Hugh.

"Who knows what may happen in that house?" she said, half beneath her breath. "If my brother should ever be free—why—one doesn't put such things into words. But you know, Nina, I'm your friend—*more* than your friend. We shall see—what the future will bring forth."

Nina Dolarro gratefully offered her lips to the older woman, and was drawn into her arms for a long embrace. Then it was time to go back to Hugh and Fay.

Only a few minutes had passed since Mary and her protêgée had left the drawing-room—not more than ten, at most—yet it seemed to both, when they thought over the conversation later, that a great deal had been accomplished, settled. They understood each other. Or, in any case, Nina Dolarro understood Miss Ffrench.

CHAPTER IX

"OH, father, may we show Miss Dolarro—Nina—the library?" asked Fay, when the three came "home." "It's my favourite room. She has lots of books of her own. I helped her pack them up, so I am sure she'll like the library."

Nina's lovely eyes brooded for an instant upon the child, but when it seemed safe that she would go into no details about the packed books, Miss Dolarro smiled at Sir Hugh.

"Fay and I are finding out that we have so many tastes in common," she said. "How lucky I am—how happy! She and I will read wonderful things together and talk them over. That's the way to educate a child, don't you think? Interest it, as you *can't* unless you're interested yourself. *Do* let's see the library?"

Sir Hugh was charmed, yet at the same time he was sad. If Sandie but had these thoughts, these tastes, instead of this stranger, what a difference it would have made in his life and Fay's! A man was a fool to think himself in love with a sweet mask of smiling youth, and take for granted the qualities behind it. But this girl appeared to have everything—beauty, intelligence, sincerity and highmindedness, combined with the most thrilling attraction of sex.

They went into the library, and Fay pointed out to Nina the shelves and corners where her favourite books were. Nina found some of her own favourites, too. It was old-fashioned in these days to love Tennyson, she said; nevertheless, she *did* love him, and she must read the "Idylls of the King" aloud to Fay. Bits here and there—verses—she had set to music. She was fond of composing—just to please herself—and singing her own compositions, though not before strangers. The things weren't good enough, and, besides, she was shy.

"Are Fay and I strangers?" asked Hugh; and he couldn't help responding with a slight thrill to the exquisite look with which those dark eyes answered "No."

Somehow, protesting a little, Miss Dolarro was persuaded to sit down at the grand piano in the drawing-room, which adjoined the library. It was a far finer instrument than the gold, flower-and-cupid painted piano in the boudoir; but Sandie had the latter kept in tune, while the fine old Steinway in the drawing-room was neglected.

When Nina Dolarro had pulled off her gloves, however, and had begun coaxing the faintly yellowed keys with her long, slim fingers, the piano seemed bewitched, under her touch, to do its best.

"Sweet is true love,
Though given in vain, in vain—"

she sang; and Sandie, entering the hall with Lord Derek Leavenworth, stopped short, astonished.

She thought at first that some one was playing and singing at her piano, in the den"; but, hastily peeping in, she saw that her territory had not been invaded.

The singing went on—a woman's voice—a mezzo, with contralto notes, full of soft pathos, and beautifully trained. Sandie was puzzled. It didn't occur to her that the mysterious singer in the drawing-room (it must be there, since there were only two pianos in the house) could be the new governess. She imagined that some friend must have called and decided to wait for her return. But it ought to be an *intimate* friend, to open the piano and while away the time by singing and playing. What intimate friend had she with a voice like that?

For the moment Sandie forgot, not only that she had allowed Derek Leavenworth to come in with her, but the very fact that he existed, so curious she was.

The drawing-room door stood ajar. Sandie tiptoed to it, and peeped in. All the lights in the gold-shaded electric candelabra had been switched on, and there at the piano sat a perfect stranger—a girl—a very beautiful, though plainly dressed girl.

Sandie pushed the door wide open, and walked into the room. There she saw her husband and Fay—Hugh in a big easy chair with the child on his knee. Instantly she knew who the singer must be, and her

heart hardened. So *this* was the way that Hugh began his campaign! Sandie made up her mind that Derry's disagreeable hints of yesterday might have a strong foundation of truth.

The "Golden Butterfly" detested scenes, and didn't intend to make one now. But she told herself that Hugh might as well have slapped her in the face as introduce this nursery-governess ("by way of being a lady!") into her drawing-room before she—his wife—had even made the creature's acquaintance! She would slap back—and *hang* the consequences!

With a gesture she called Leavenworth to her side, and as a slight sound brought Ffrench's eyes to the door, Lord Derek and Sandie stood there together, listening.

Hugh felt the blood sting his face, and his ears tingled. He and Sandie had "had it out" yesterday in the hall, and she knew what his opinion of Leavenworth was, as a friend for her. Yet apparently the two had been out somewhere in each other's company, precisely as if he hadn't spoken. He detested "scenes" fully as much as Sandie disliked them, however, and even if he had wished to cut Leavenworth, or turn him out of the house, he would have refrained in the presence of Fay and the new governess.

For an instant Nina Dolarro sang on, unconscious that her audience had silently increased. She heard no sound save her own voice and touch on the piano keys, but there is a queer mental attraction in a stare

of dislike. An adverse magnetism jangled her nerves, and involuntarily her eyes turned to the door.

Instantly she ceased playing. Her voice stopped on a note soft and sad as the coo of a dove. With a deep blush she rose from the music-stool, and stood still, to Sandie's eyes maddeningly meek and beautiful.

Sandie also was silent. She wished also to be maddening. Maddening to Hugh, who deserved to be maddened.

What he may have felt he did not show. He made the new governess known to his wife, and tacitly explained—for Miss Dolarro's protection, not his own—why they were so late.

"And, oh, Sandie, isn't it lovely that Nina sings and plays?" exclaimed Fay. "Now I sh'an't be bothering you so much to sing me things, when you don't want to, or are busy. And father says he'll buy a *real* piano for the nursery. Won't that be splendid?"

"Splendid," echoed Sandie, flashing a look at Hugh.

He gave no sign of understanding it, but Fay saw, and wondered if Sandie didn't want father to buy her a real piano. Or was Sandie still angry about the governess coming to take the place of Nurse? Fay had hoped that when she saw how pretty and kind Nina was, Sandie would, after all, be pleased, and not cross any more.

For a moment the three—husband, wife and child—were intensely absorbed in one another. It was quite a short moment, as such moments go, but gave

Nina Dolarro time to do three things: First, to see Lord Derek Leavenworth, who had come into the room behind Sandie; secondly, to meet his eyes and read a message there; thirdly, to move to a chair on which she had laid her long blue cape and gauntlet gloves before sitting down at the piano.

This chair was close to the door—therefore close to Lord Derek. With the backs of Sir Hugh and Lady Ffrench squarely turned upon him, the moment was as useful to him as to Nina. He flashed out a visiting card, hurriedly scrawled on it a few words in pencil, stepped forward, laid the card on Nina's cloak, and stepped back again. In picking up the cape and gloves she palmed the card, but not before she had read the scribbled message, for she was able to answer by a lifting and dropping of her darkly fringed eyelids.

Suddenly the Princess remembered the existence of her slave. She turned from Hugh to him.

"Oh, I promised you a book, didn't I—Derry!" she said, dwelling on the nickname because it would annoy Hugh. "Annoy" was the word in her mind, for Sandie was unable to conceive that she might actually disgust a man. "Come along!" she went on. "The book's in my den. Hugh will ring for a servant to show Miss Dolarro where the nursery is."

"Fay and I will show her," Ffrench replied, "as you're too busy."

"Busy? I should think I was!" echoed Sandie. "I've got to dress and be at Claridge's at eight o'clock

sharp. It's all I can do! Let's hurry up, Derry."

Purposely she gave the impression that she and Leavenworth had an engagement together, but Hugh showed no sign of attaching the slightest importance to the situation.

"She wants to humiliate me in the eyes of the child's governess," he thought furiously. "I'm damned if she shall see that I care. And I'm damned if I do *care!* I believe I've hardened—since last night. So long as she doesn't run right off the rails—so long as she doesn't disgrace her own child—let her go her way, and I'll go mine, as I have done."

He did not realise that "going his way" didn't seem quite so utterly desolate as it had seemed only yesterday.

At ten minutes to eight Sandie flew out to her waiting motor, a flash of jade-green and gold and pearls. There was no saying good-night to Fay. That delightful new programme was over, almost as soon as it began. Sandie wasn't going to share the little thing's caresses with Miss Dolarro, who already was "Nina" to the child.

"There goes Sandie's car," sighed Fay hearing the sound of the motor as Nina undressed her. I thought maybe she would—— But never mind. She *said* she was in a hurry."

"No, *never* mind," Miss Dolarro echoed. "I'm here, and I love you dearly. So does your father, I know. Haven't we had a wonderful day? And all

our days are going to be more and more wonderful. You'll see!"

This was a consolation. Yet it wasn't quite enough. Sandie had had such a strange look on her face when she went out of the drawing-room with Lord Derry. Not cross, and not sad, but—what *was* it, then? Fay remembered a long word she had found in Shakespeare, and how Nurse and Mrs. Jennings had laughed when she used it, separating and emphasising each syllable: "Des-per-ate." Had Sandie looked desperate? If so, whose fault was it? It couldn't be father's. And how could it be Nina's, when Nina was so sweet? Because she kept on wondering so much about this, Fay couldn't kiss Nina as affectionately as she ought to have done. There seemed to be a shadow between them. The imaginative child fancied that she could actually see it, like a dark veil. It was a cold shadow, too, and it chilled the warmth of her heart.

Hugh Ffrench did not intend to dine at home that night. If he could have had Fay and Miss Dolarro at the table with him there would have been extraordinary pleasure in such a meal; but Fay was too young to stay up for late dinners. Her bedtime was supposed to be eight o'clock or thereabouts; and, of course, he could not invite the governess to dine with him alone, especially on the first night of her arrival.

He had told Sandie that the girl must be asked to "lunch with the family" when they were alone, or had

no formal party. Mary had warned him that her protégée must be treated with respect by her brother and his wife. But dinner was a different affair. Hugh had a dim idea that even "lady nursery-governesses" like this one dined in their own sitting-rooms. And that made him wonder if Miss Dolarro had a sitting-room? He had rushed off so impulsively in in the morning with Fay, after learning of Nurse's defection, that there'd been no time to consider details, and now his ears burned at the thought of that exquisite creature inheriting old McClellan's quarters!

The girl had been so utterly unbusiness-like, and had accepted the new position with such trusting confidence, that it was all the more unpardonable to "let her down." What could he do about it? he asked himself, on the point of leaving the house for his favourite club.

Sandie had already gone. There was little hope that *she* had made any special arrangements for the Italian girl's comfort. Even if she hadn't forgotten, she was not in a frame of mind to trouble herself about the governess. Yet Hugh could hardly bear to let Miss Dolarro spend the night in Nurse McClellan's bedroom, unchanged, unimproved for her benefit. She would feel like a servant! How homesick she would be for Beech Hill Farm, and her friend Mrs. Harkness!

Hugh hated the idea that this sweet, unworldly

creature should suffer homesickness in his house, and feel neglected, despised. No, hang it all, that simply mustn't be allowed to happen!

He had left his car in front of the house, intending to go out again within the hour; but now he deliberately reopened the front door, which he had just closed behind him, and went back into the hall. For a moment he stood whistling softly, uncertain what to do, when he thought of Mrs. Jennings. . . . Good old soul, it was her job, as housekeeper, to see that Miss Dolarro was comfortable, and perhaps she had seen to it. He would soon find out. Luckily, the old thing wasn't the sort to suspect ulterior motives in him, because he had brought the governess home, and because she was young and pretty.

Instead of sending for Mrs. Jennings, he went to her sitting-room, in the huge basement, which had windows looking upon the garden in the back. She had been housekeeper in his father's house, which was now his, ever since he could remember, and he had "taken her over" as a legacy when he came into his title, ten years ago, a boy just twenty-one. She had been very good about his marriage, and had always got on well with Sandie, though she was of the Mary Ffrench strain of thought in many ways, and must secretly disapprove of her young mistress's régime.

The old woman, who was sixty at the least, rose up to greet Sir Hugh. She was far too respectful to show surprise at the unexpected visit. She seemed

quite grieved, and "took blame to herself," when she had to answer his first question in the negative.

"I ought to have *thought,* Sir Hugh," she said, "without waiting for instructions from her ladyship or you. It's my business to think of such things, for you and my lady give me pretty well *carte blanche.* I had Mrs. McClellan's bedroom tidied up, of course, and everything made nice enough. But there was nothing special done, I'm sorry to say, and no sitting-room prepared. Perhaps now that Miss Fay is to take regular lessons from a real governess, there'll have to be a schoolroom got ready as soon as may be? How would it be to fit up the two small front rooms on the third floor for a schoolroom, and a sitting-room for the governess? They are kept for guest-rooms now, but haven't had any one in them for several years. They communicate, you may remember, Sir Hugh, for one of them used to be your bedroom when you were quite a little boy."

Yes, Sir Hugh remembered, and approved of Mrs. Jennings's plan. The matter or rearrangement should be attended to, and the work begun to-morrow. Some expert should be called in from a decorator's. Meanwhile, he'd be glad if Mrs. Jennings would tell Miss Dolarro, with his compliments, what was being done.

"Speak to her to-night," he added. "I don't like her to begin by supposing that we're careless of her comfort, and that she's not going to be treated with

proper consideration in this house. She's a friend of Miss Mary's, you know, Jennings."

"Quite so, Sir Hugh; I'll see to it—and early, too, you may be sure, as the young lady will probably be tired, and wish to go to bed in good time."

Hugh felt somewhat relieved, though he wished that he had thought of all this sooner, and could have spoken to Miss Dolarro on the way home. Then she would have been prepared, and have felt no chill of disappointment at first sight of her unsuitable surroundings. He'd have a word with her on the subject in the morning—at Fay's breakfast-time maybe.

He was consoling himself thus as he mounted the stairs from the basement and walked along the passage which led to the dining-room and the panelled front hall. But there, in the hall, was Miss Dolarro herself, dressed for the street. She was fumbling with the door, as if puzzled by the mystery of the lock, but almost instantly Ffrench was beside her.

"Let me open the door for you," he said. "The catch is rather queer."

The girl started with surprise, and blushed to her forehead.

"Oh, Sir Hugh, I thought you'd gone some time ago?" she exclaimed. "I—I'm not going *out,* thank you. I've just come in. I ran down the street for a moment to find a pillar-box and post a letter—to Mrs. Harkness. I promised she should have one first thing to-morrow morning, so when Fay had dropped off to

sleep I—oh, I hope it was all right to leave her for just a little while?"

He laughed.

"What nonsense! Of course it was! One would think I was a sort of ogre, the way you're apologising to me for nothing at all. You look almost frightened!"

"I don't think I *would* be frightened of you—unless I had done something really wrong," Nina answered, giving him a lovely look from under the curled brim of her hat. "But, you see, it's my *first* night."

"That reminds me of why I'm not away yet," said Ffrench. "I went downstairs to see the housekeeper and try to have things put right for you, as they ought to be." He hurried into an explanation, and the girl kept looking up at him so exquisitely that once or twice he lost the thread of what he was saying. Her gratitude was quite confusing, too. In any one not so altogether perfect as Nina Dolarro, it might have been slightly gushing, perhaps; but such a word was utterly unsuited to anything she could say or do. It was simply that she was of Latin and Celtic blood, which made her manner rather warmer than that of Anglo-Saxon women.

"How *kind* of you to wait and talk to Mrs. Jennings to-night, when you had some engagement of your own—and you've made yourself late for it!" she thanked him. "Now you must go at once. *You* are

making me feel guilty—that you should be inconvenienced for my sake."

"I'm only going to my club," he said. "I'm glad I met you—glad I was able to say this to you myself!" Then, on a sudden impulse: "I suppose you've had dinner?"

What the impulse would lead up to could be clearly read. Miss Dolarro was far from stupid, and must have guessed what wish was in her employer's mind—a hospitable, if unconventional wish; and some girls might have encouraged him to put it into words. But not so with Nina.

"Oh, yes—yes!" she assured him, with almost unflattering emphasis. "I've had my dinner—a very nice one, thank you. I came down directly after. Goodbye, Sir Hugh—*kind* Sir Hugh!"

There was no excuse to linger. She really wanted him to go. He took the grateful hand she held out and pressed it. How friendly it felt, and warm, though evidently she was the soul of discretion. He liked her all the better for that.

Outside, with the door shut between them, he was still smiling, and smiling as he started his motor, long ago grown cold in waiting.

Funny she hadn't noticed the car standing there when she went to post her letter! But she hadn't thought about it, evidently, as she supposed that he had gone. Even clever women were often singularly unobservant!

The grandfather clock on the stairs chimed the quarter to nine as the door closed on Sir Hugh, but Nina Dolarro didn't go up to her room, as he pictured her doing. She waited until she heard the motor take her employer away—then three minutes more, to give plenty of time for him in his car to have turned the corner, in either direction. Then she glanced about, and, seeing no one, softly opened the door. She had no latchkey, however, and was reluctantly obliged to close it with a bang when she was on the other side. She hoped that the sound hadn't been heard by a servant, but it couldn't be helped if it had. What she *must* think of now was haste—*haste!* That talk with Sir Hugh—though pleasant, and just what she would have wished for at a more convenient time—had delayed her for eight or ten minutes. And every minute was important. If she missed that appointment scrawled in pencil on Lord Derek Leavenworth's card, she felt that she wouldn't be able to bear the suspense.

CHAPTER X

FAY dreamed strange dreams, that fluttered from Sandie to Nina Dolarro, and then brought the two together. Always she waked with a jump before anything happened; yet within her, deeper than consciousness, there seemed to lie knowledge of great trouble hanging over some one she loved—trouble which, in the dreams, she was trying to ward off without knowing what it was, or what she ought to do.

As the child dreamed, Nina Dolarro was walking fast through the darkness. She had not far to go. Only to take the right as she left the house, hurry on till she came to the first corner, turn, and stop when she came in sight of a grey motor-car in front of an unoccupied house that had bills of "For Sale or To Let" in the windows.

From such slight acquaintance as she had had with him in the past, Nina imagined that Derek Leavenworth would not be a patient man. Far from that! Very spoiled and exigeant. She feared that this appointed meeting meant more to her than it did to him, and if so, he might have gone away in disgust at being kept waiting.

There were two or three cars in the street where she had been told to look for a grey one. Nina's

breath came fast as she saw that they were ordinary taxis. What if—— But no! He *hadn't* gone! He hadn't played her a trick. There stood the car in front of the unoccupied house.

Nina was a little frightened as she saw a liveried chauffeur in the front seat. She didn't care about being spied on in these circumstances, by chauffeurs. There was such a thing as blackmail. She had hoped that Lord Derek would drive his own car. Still, she had to run the risk, and walk slowly past. It gave her some slight relief to see that the well-trimmed man in livery did not turn his head, and that the eyes under the brim of his smart cap appeared to be half shut.

No sooner had she vaguely paused opposite the door of the limousine than it was opened from within. There was not light enough in the street to penetrate the darkened car, and the girl could not recognise the figure seated inside. But she had no doubt whose it was. The opening of the door was a silent invitation. She accepted it, stepped into the car, subsided upon the springy cushions, and sat still, waiting for her companion to make the first move.

Without a word to her, he picked up the speaking-tube, and directed the chauffeur to start at once.

"Drive slowly," he said, "and take us into the Park. You can go round and round there till I tell you what to do next."

When the car had begun to move, Leavenworth turned to Nina.

"I was quite flattered to see that you remembered me," he said. "No reason why you should, really! You were much too occupied with another man, at the time we met, to take any notice of me. That rather hurt, I must confess. But when I saw there was 'nothing doing,' as they say over there, I turned my attention in other directions. Self-defence, you know! And now I'm as much occupied as you were then—deep in! You needn't be afraid of me again—in *that* way. But there *is* the past, you know! And this world's a small place. Our meeting at the Ffrenchs', with me as a family friend, and you as the child's governess, proves that, doesn't it? Were you surprised to see me there?"

"Yes," admitted Nina. "I was—of course."

"Not exactly 'of course.' You're a pal of Miss Mary Ffrench's, aren't you? She might have told you certain things."

"She didn't say anything about you," Nina cautiously replied. "But I saw her only for a few minutes alone—this evening. And she engaged me yesterday by telegram—with just a short letter to follow. Perhaps she may mention—whatever you mean—later."

"I'm going to tell you myself to-night, what there is to tell—more than *she* knows," said Leavenworth. "I should have been as surprised to see you as you were to see me if Lady Ffrench hadn't happened to speak of you to-night. I wasn't *quite* sure whether her Miss Dolarro and mine (if I may use that word) were one

and the same. But—again as they say in America—I had a 'hunch' it would turn out that way. It was a lucky 'hunch,' because it gave me time to prepare a plan of action. You and I have got to be allies or enemies in the House of Ffrench, Miss Dolarro!"

"There is surely no reason why we should be enemies!" said Nina, after an instant's reflection.

"No reason, if you're willing to *see* reason!" Leavenworth laughed pleasantly. "We'll have a good talk all about that in a minute. But first let me ask you a question. And you may as well answer, even if you think it's cheeky of me, and what women call 'unchivalrous,' because I can easily find out to-morrow, anyhow. Does Lady Ffrench know what you were doing in America?"

"I was doing no harm!" Nina evaded him.

"No harm at all, but not precisely the sort of thing that is expected from a governess. She *doesn't* know, I may take it?"

"She doesn't," Nina echoed.

"What about Miss Ffrench?"

"Miss Ffrench is one of my best friends——"

"She's an acquaintance of mine. Though she doesn't approve of me, she like my sister (who's a great pal of Sandie Ffrench's) and Bee could ask her if——"

"I think you are very cruel!" Nina broke out. "I suppose it's revenge because I wouldn't flirt with

you—seriously—in Washington. I wouldn't have *thought* you'd be like that, Lord Derek!"

"I'm *not* 'like that.' I don't want to do you any harm, if you can justify your presence at the Ffrenchs' by being useful to me. Otherwise, well, I'm Lady Ffrench's friend more than I am yours—naturally—and it's partly your own fault, so I'd be inclined to protect her against—an adventuress, if necessary."

"Oh!" cried Nina, tears in her voice.

"If *necessary*. You see, I'm very fond of Sandie Ffrench. That's what I thought her sister-in-law (who *isn't* fond of her) might have told you about me. Now I'm pretty sure you're speaking the truth when you say she told you nothing. I'm almost as sure as I am that you didn't confide in Miss Ffrench about your—let's call them *side*-activities in America; when you got tired of governessing and companioning, you know."

"I begin to see what you mean about being 'allies,'" Nina said, controlling herself.

"I thought you'd pick your cue quickly, my dear! But now we've come to the time for explanations. No use my letting you jump to wrong conclusions, and having to put you right afterwards. There's a specific way in which you can help me in the Ffrenchs' house, and maybe there'll be one in which I can help you."

"Please tell me," Nina begged, her sweet and gentle self again.

"I will in a minute. But before I get to what I want

you to do for me, let's see if I've got hold of you all right!"

"What a queer expression!" she protested.

"The situation's queer, too, wherever you look at it. Now, listen. You're a very beautiful and attractive girl—or, rather woman, for you're no 'chicken.' You must be close on twenty-seven, I should think."

"I'm not quite twenty-three!"

"Tommy-rot, my dear! Keep that stuff for Hugh Ffrench. It will go down there—and all the rest of the young-girl-innocence dope. He's just in the mood to be—blotting paper to your simple violet ink! That's the game, isn't it?"

"Oh! I don't know what you mean!" agonised Nina. "There is no game. I have to earn my living. Dear Miss Ffrench——"

"A woman like you doesn't need to be a child's governess to earn a living. You know that from experience. You were always on the 'make,' I'm sure, ever since you launched yourself upon a career, maybe ten or eleven years ago. With luck, and your face and ways, you ought to have married a millionaire, in one country or another where you went hunting, fair Diana!"

"I never had any luck!" confessed Nina.

"Millionaires aren't easy to pick up, as *husbands,* in Italy or France, I daresay," went on Leavenworth. "Not for a girl starting without money or any family background, no matter how bewitching she may be.

But there was America. You tried your hand there. You met the millionaires all right, I know, for I saw you doing it."

"They were all married, the ones that came my way. Life isn't a novel! I had every kind of chance except the kind I wanted."

"To annex a husband who could give you 'place and power.' I approve of your ambition. Was it when you gave up hope of its being fulfilled that you —occupied yourself in the way you were occupied when you and I met?"

"I fell in love!" Nina was weeping now.

"Even with a girl like you, no doubt love *would* stand in front of ambition—for a little while."

"A girl like me!" she echoed. "What do you know of me—the *real* me?"

"Well," said Leavenworth, "I've had quite a lot of experience studying women. They've liked me and I've liked them, so the study paid. I judged you, from the first time we met, as a girl who might take fire, but would put the fire out eventually for ambition's sake, unless love and glory could be combined. By the by, it would interest me to hear what become of—which name shall I call him by?"

"We're nothing to each other any more," Nina said sadly. "He couldn't afford to marry me."

"But he is in England? I can find out——"

"Yes, then! But I tell you he has no longer any influence on my life."

"That bears out my theory. You've swung back from love to ambition. Maybe you had some plan in which he had a place. But Miss Ffrench telegraphed, and wrote, and you saw possibilities. Then on top of that you met Ffrench himself."

Nina let Lord Derek pause for her reply, but gave him none. Leavenworth went on. "That part—for you, would be simple, *if it weren't for me.* I'm where the complications come in. I can make or break you, my dear, in that house."

"Please—*make* me, then!" almost whispered Nina.

"You admit it's what you want?"

"If he's not happy—Miss Ffrench says he isn't—I'd try to make him so, in case—that is—you know what I mean. Oh, Lord Derek, if I could have peace and rest, and a high place in the world, such as I've always wanted, and *felt I ought* to have, I'd be good as gold is good. I'd be a splendid wife for a man like Sir Hugh Ffrench."

"I daresay you would," agreed Leavenworth. "'Go to it' is my advice. Go to it! Make Sandie jealous. Make her think that her husband is humiliating her, every day in every way. Don't be too cautious—don't be too slow. And yet don't go so fast that there'll be a flare-up. If she actually turned you out of the house it might be awkward. Take the pose of innocence—that it's all *Sir Hugh's fault*—that you appeal to her to protect you from him, for his own sake as well as yours—not from anything you *fear,* but from the gen-

eral situation that you see developing. Her pride will be on fire in a minute. She'll have a sharp reaction in favour of me. It needs something strong, I've begun to see, to get her to move. Then you can be useful in various other ways. I'll explain them in good time; it isn't necessary now. But—are you *on,* my dear?"

"I'm on," Nina repeated.

She hated this talk. But, after all, it had cleared the air. She began to think that perhaps Providence—her own special Providence—and not the Devil, as she'd feared at first, had brought this old acquaintance of hers into Sir Hugh Ffrench's house.

The law of "cause and effect" is an invidious law. The first "effect" becomes a new "cause" for a second "effect," and so on and on in an endless chain.

Sandie Ffrench blamed Hugh for not "understanding" her, for falling in love with her because she was what she was, then sternly wanting her to be "different." Hugh blamed Sandie for frivolity and heartlessness. He would have said that, if he judged her harshly, it was because she deserved such judgment. She would have insisted that, if he hadn't been harsh to her, she would never have shown herself heartless to him; that her "frivolity" was only a protective armour that she put on because he was disappointing. Hugh would have been sure that he was speaking the truth, and the last thing Sandie would have doubted was her own good faith. And so each helped to close the vicious circle in which they both went round and

round, seemingly with no way out. But was there no way out?

The night of Nina Dolarro's arrival, Derek Leavenworth made his appearance at Claridge's in time to dance with Lady Ffrench. Sandie had had no chance at home to ask what he thought of Miss Dolarro's looks, but it was the first question she put as he took her from her escort, for "Stumbling."

He had an instant of self-consciousness, wondering if in some incredible way she'd learn that he and Nina had had a *rendezvous*. But it was only for an instant. Sandie's face told her emotions as transparently as a watch-crystal shows the moving hour and minute hands. Sure that she had no suspicion, he answered:

"Oh, the girl's a beauty. There can't be two opinions about that. But she isn't *my* kind. You know the type that is."

"Don't be obvious, Derry!" Sandie laughed. "I suppose I asked for that. Should you think she was Hugh's type?"

"Would it hurt your feelings if I said 'Yes'?"

"Of course not. I'm past caring what type of woman interests Hugh. I suppose any type that was in strong contrast to me. I ceased to interest him as soon as he'd safely got me for his wife."

"Some fellows *are* like that," said Leavenworth. "Cold, hard chaps like Ffrench who can't put up with the strain of romance for long."

Sandie was taken aback at this description of her

husband. There had been a time when she'd thought Hugh Ffrench the very opposite of cold or hard, a time when he had seemed the embodiment of romance in the shape of man to her, and he'd made her believe that she had turned the world to romance for him. But perhaps he always had been cold and hard, and she had seen him illumined by the glamour of her first love—what she had fancied was love. Probably a man was a better judge of another man than a woman could be; and it wasn't as if Derek were jealous of Hugh. There was nothing to be jealous of, where Hugh was concerned!

"A man who could treat a fairy princess as Ffrench treats you, would *have* to be cold," Leavenworth went on. "This Dolarro girl strikes me—at first sight—as more the type for him than you are. He's a Puritan, and he'll accept her for a saint, whether she is one or not. My child, they're made for one another, just as you and I are made for each other. The way eyes gazed into eyes this evening—well, sort of suggested, didn't it, that they'd begun to find it out? If they have——won't it simplify things for you and me? I may be right or I may be wrong in the suspicions you made me speak out last night. But if I'm right, and you see the proof of it every day before your eyes in your own house, can you stay on—the meek, all-suffering wife—or will you let me give you a life of happiness, far away? I swear I could do it!"

"I wonder!" murmured Sandie. The music and

the man's close touch thrilled her a little, with the thought that Derry's love, and the love of many other men, might be hers for the taking—that romance wasn't dead for her just because Hugh had failed her. Yet she was very unhappy. There seemed to be a great chilly thing, like a lump of ice, where her warm, woman's heart ought to be. And she didn't know why she should be so heavily, coldly sad. That made the pain even worse—not to know what it was or why it came; not to be able to analyse it at all, or even soften the suffering by telling Derek about it, and being soothed by him. Not for the world would she tell Derek! He might misunderstand, and imagine that she still cared for Hugh.

"Do you mean that by and by Hugh will deliberately give me cause to divorce him, so he can marry the 'saint'?" Sandie forced herself to ask.

"He'll be cautious, I think," said Leavenworth. "But one thing I am sure of—he'll give you provocation. I believe and hope that, whatever else may happen, he'll drive you—where you are now."

"Where I am now?" she echoed, puzzled.

"You're in my arms, where I want to keep you always. *I'm* no Puritan! I'm a pagan. And so are you."

Sandie didn't feel like a pagan just then, if a pagan were a creature full of wild and free emotion. She felt simply miserable, and wanted to cry. Of course, it was good to be loved by a man like Derek Leaven-

worth. On the whole, she liked him better than the other men she knew. He was big and handsome, rather a bully, and she couldn't help thrilling to that type when it had the mystery of strangeness—when it wasn't a *husband.*

But somehow the past kept rising before her mind that night, as the music carried her on. Those dances with Hugh, when *he* was the only man in the world —going back to the Front—perhaps to be killed. And, because, he wasn't rich and she was, she had *almost* proposed. Wonderful nights! She would never know anything like them again. But she was twenty-six now. Then she'd been eighteen. Perhaps that made a vast, a heart-breaking difference. She was growing blasé these days. Anyhow, she was disillusioned. What she might work herself up to feel for Derek to spite Hugh (yes, to *spite* Hugh!) was doubtless the best love she was capable of feeling in future.

But the very thought that it *was* the best gave her a sensation of sickness. Oh, she was wretched! She wanted to go home. Only, home wasn't worth going to. Nobody loved or wanted her there except Fay, and Fay—that sweet little doll she had liked to play with sometimes when she wasn't too busy—was being taken away from her now. Hugh had suddenly developed an interest in the child—of course, as an excuse to be with Miss Dolarro. And Fay was already calling that foreign woman "Nina." Oh, Derek was

right. She wouldn't be able to stand it long. But it didn't seem to matter much what became of her.

She glanced up suddenly at Derek, with a responsive look, smiling because he classed himself and her together as "pagans"; but there was a rather hard look in his black eyes, or she imagined it.

Some people—women he didn't like—Mary Ffrench, for instance—said that Derek Leavenworth was a fortune-hunter. He liked beauty and charm too much to marry a woman without either, they admitted, unless he got much more hard-up than his usual state of affairs. But he would never take a wife, these women prophesied, till he could get one at least as rich as she was pretty.

Leavenworth blessed more than ever his American experiences and the hold they had given him over Fay Ffrench's governess. He had realised that it would be hard to tear Sandie away from conventionalities when it came to the wrench. She would cling to every single reed that might hold her to her shibboleths, hating them all the while.

But Nina Dolarro's presence was destined to be the bombshell in this pretty child's river of life which would tear the last reeds up by their roots. He thought that he wouldn't have long to wait. Indeed, he couldn't afford to wait long, for—though he really loved Sandie Ffrench for her troubling beauty, her childlike, teasing charm, and wanted her for herself—it was the money which determined him to risk

ostracism. His father, Lord Loringford, was perhaps the "hardest-up" marquis in England, which was saying a good deal in these post-war days; his elder brother was practically bankrupt, and Derek was deep in debt—had been ever since he went to America at a time when the old aristocracy of Europe was down as low as the money exchange in the new world's market, and he had failed to annex an heiress worth having.

He might have chosen between two or three who weren't "worth having"—ladies with long noses and eyes too close together, who would watch over their own shekels; or ladies of unmixed German ancestry and too generous figures. But Derek hadn't been quite desperate then, and he had preferred owing a few thousand pounds all over the place to being saddled with a plain, common wife. And if he could get Sandie Ffrench his romantic and financial needs could be satisfied together.

He was in a hurry to make sure of her—if one could be sure of pinning down a butterfly while it still fluttered free. But it had been his point of view, even before he had transferred it to Sandie, that Nina Dolarro's presence in Hugh Ffrench's house would be useful to build up public opinion for the future, as well as in more immediate ways; so he urged Sandie only enough to keep her realising how much in love he was.

CHAPTER XI

THE next morning, Lady Ffrench awoke earlier than usual, for she had come home soon after midnight. She rang for Hortense, who came in promptly with hot, delicious tea and a pile of letters.

"Miladi is in great beauty this morning," remarked the maid, who was a privileged character, and knew her mistress's likes and dislikes. "What a pity that I should be the only one to see her so!"

Sandie glanced involuntarily at a mirror, placed on the wall within view of the foot of the bed, expressly to give the sleeper awakened a first view of herself.

It was true, she thought; she did look rather a darling, with her bobbed, yellow hair curling over her head, her eyes like blue stars, and her cheeks like roses with sunrise dew upon them! Her neck and shoulders had the creamy lustre of pearls, she couldn't help telling herself, as they rose from her low-necked "nighty" of half-transparent georgette. Yes, it was a shame that so much sweetness should be wasted. It was two years now since she and Hugh had been as other husbands and wives—longer still since they had been real lovers.

What could he expect? And it was his own fault. "Cold and hard," Derek had called him. But for a

while—till he tired of her, as he'd tired of his wife—Hugh wouldn't be cold or hard to that *girl.* He would be charming as only Hugh could be charming, just in the same way he had been for Melisande Morgan and perhaps others—yes, others she hadn't found out about, in their separated lives.

"I wonder if *she's* as pretty, like *this,* as I am?" Sandie wondered, with a little, gnawing hurt in her heart. "Perhaps *he'd* think so. Perhaps he's seen her so already. Perhaps the creature's been up in Yorkshire, and that's why he's stuck so close to his old Harlow Wood!"

The golden Caravan tea was bitter in her mouth, and when she had pushed the cup aside she began viciously to tear apart envelope after envelope, ignoring the tiny letter-opener which Hortense had laid beside the pile.

It was a day when American letters came, and Sandie had several. One was from a rich but boring old-maid cousin, who announced that she and her companion were coming to London, on their way to the Riviera for the winter. Would dear Sandie put them up for ten days or two weeks? Cousin Caroline Nichols had heard that London hotels weren't as comfortable as they used to be before the war. Besides, it would be nice to have a "real cosy visit with little Sandie, and make acquaintance with her husband and baby girl."

"Not if I know it!" exclaimed Sandie aloud, forgetting her most serious troubles for a moment. She

then proceeded to explain the situation to Hortense, who was much in her confidence. "Fussy old thing! I couldn't stand her for two days—much less ten! And the companion's a shade more deadly, if possible. Lucky I've got all the money I need, so I don't have to be nice to her for *hers!* I shall cable and say I'm very sorry we've only one guest-room. I won't mention the dressing-room adjoining, which might do for Miss Simpson. Of course there *are* two rooms on the third floor, with a door between, which would suit the old things, if they knew about them. But thank *goodness* they don't!"

"Miladi may be even more thankful," smiled Hortense, "that she will not be called on to tell a falsehood —for the spare rooms on the third floor are no longer available."

"What!" cried Sandie, staring. "What do you mean? What's happened to them—and when?"

"Only this morning, miladi," replied Hortense, with sly joy. She was fond of her mistress, and admired her sincerely, but she was very human and very Parisian—which is the same as saying that she had a spice of malice, and loved gossip or sensation at any price.

"Have the ceilings fallen?" Sandie demanded.

"No, miladi. Yet they are to be redecorated and changed. A person from Garvin and Millow's is expected this morning. Already one of the rooms is being cleared of furniture—the one that's to be made

into a schoolroom for Mademoiselle Fay. Miladi would have been waked by the noise if her room were at the front of the house instead of at the back."

For a moment Sandie was speechless.

"Sir Hugh gave these orders?" she gasped at last.

"But yes, miladi."

"When, I should like to know?"

"Last evening, I believe, miladi. He spoke to Mrs. Jennings himself, in her room. I happened to see him. It was soon after miladi had gone to her dinner at Claridge's. He then went out himself. A little later the new governess went out also, though not of course, with him."

"Oh!" cried Sandie. "He wouldn't even pay me the compliment of mentioning the idea, if not consulting me. *That* would be too much to hope for! So Fay is to have a regular schoolroom, as well as a regular governess. And the governess goes out in the evening, no one knows where. Life begins for my daughter!"

"Yes, miladi. And Sir Hugh is staying to consult with the monsieur, the expert decorator from Garvin and Millow's, instead of returning to Yorkshire today, as James said he expected to do."

"Well," said Sandie, with blazing eyes, "I suppose it's none of my business. That's what he wants to show me. I'm a *child,* am I not? I'm supposed to know *nothing.* But you spoke about the *two* rooms.

What is the second one to be turned into? A playroom?"

"No, miladi. It will be a sitting-room for the governess. And I understand that there will be some improvements in her bedroom also—Madame McClellan's room that was. Such things will be done as need not incommode Mademoiselle Dolarro while in residence. It is true, she is a pretty and refined young lady, and furniture that was very well for Madame McClellan will not be so suitable for her."

Sandie's cheeks, that had been flushed with sleep, burned scarlet with anger. Hortense pretended not to notice it, though she was enjoying herself hugely. Miladi, she thought, was not likely to take this slap in the face "lying down," and a certain liveliness in the house might now be expected.

"Give me a foreign cable form," commanded Lady Ffrench. "I'll wire Miss Nichols that she and her companion can come. Then turn my bath on, and put in the crystals. I want to get up."

Ffrench was in one of the late spare rooms on the third floor when Sandie, looking more than pretty, and smartly dressed for the street in smoke-blue velvet, suddenly appeared in the doorway. With him was a youngish man who looked like a cross between a high-class tradesman and an artist.

"The furniture's hopeless trash," Hugh was saying. "Awful period! Let's have this room French—Louis XVI—carved wood, pretty grey, with gilded cane,

and pink carpet and curtains. What? Does that go in with your ideas?"

"Quaite, Sir Hugh—quaite!" the tradesman-artist replied.

"I think my cousin, Caroline Nichols, would rather have the room left just as it is," interrupted Sandie. "It's Victorian, and so is she."

Her words gave Hugh the first warning of his wife's presence.

One glance at her brilliant eyes and burning cheeks told him that she was out for battle. He had forgotten the existence of her cousin, but his quick insight assured him that the lady in question was an extraneous detail, a mere banner to wave. Sandie's angry beauty was almost hateful to him, and he was as ready to fight for his rights as she was for hers. But he didn't intend to fight before a stranger.

"While Mr. Samson takes some measurements here, let us go into the next room and discuss this," he proposed.

For a moment Sandie would have liked to wave the banner before Mr. Samson's eyes, for the sake of annoying her husband; but Hugh looked dangerous, and she was dimly afraid of being worsted in the encounter.

Hugh held the door open. She passed through into the adjoining room, her head high, but her breath quick. She tried to control her emotions, for Hugh mustn't imagine that he had frightened her. He closed

the door as he followed her in, and the thought flashed through Sandie's head that it was a thick door. Unless they raised their voices, they could thrash out this business thoroughly without being overheard. And she meant to thrash it out thoroughly!

"This is to be Fay's schoolroom," Ffrench announced, looking his wife in the eyes. "The one we've come from will be a sitting-room for her governess."

"Mrs. McClellan never had a sitting-room," said Sandie. "She was a much more important and experienced person than this Irish or Italian creature—or whatever she is. Why should Miss Dolarro put on airs that will prevent me from having my relations come to my house?"

"In all the years we've been married, you've never used these rooms," Ffrench reminded her. "There's a big spare room with a dressing-room and a bath, near your own quarters. You can put your guests there. And I've always understood you to say that you disliked having visitors in town—that they were a nuisance!"

"So they are," Sandie agreed; "but one can't always do things the way one likes best, as I've learned since I married. My cousin Caroline would be offended if I stuck her companion into a cramped-up dressing-room. She's afraid of Miss Simpson. So am I."

"A good reason for not having them visit you," said Ffrench.

"The lady must be formidable, to inspire *you* with

fear. Neither God nor the devil has ever done so, apparently, to judge from your actions."

"Which simply means that I refuse to be afraid of you!" flung back Sandie. "If I'm to consider this house my home, I insist upon being free to put my visitors where I choose. I'm not going to be interfered with by a foreign nursery-governess—an upper servant!"

Hugh's face looked as if it had been carved out of pale bronze. If he had been her lover, not her husband, Sandie would have thrilled to the strength in him, for strength was what she adored in men—other men. But he was her husband. He was tyrannising over her, and she hated him.

"Miss Dolarro is not a servant, as you know very well," he said. "Mrs. McClellan was one. What was right for a nurse is not for a governess—an educated, accomplished girl of our own class. Besides, the principal need is for a schoolroom for Fay—your own daughter. You must see that, if you have eyes for any one but yourself. Even if it were not a question of new quarters for her governess (which it is, and shall be), there would be only one room on this floor available for a guest. If your cousin and her companion *really* propose to visit here, after letting you alone for eight years, I'm afraid the only accommodation for them will be the suite downstairs."

In spite of her efforts at self-control, Sandie's sweet voice grew shrill.

"You used the word 'really' as if you thought I *lied!*" she broke out.

Hugh was silent. But the corners of his lips twitched slightly, as if with an inward smile. Sandie longed to strike him.

"I'll show you cousin Caroline's letter that came this morning, as proof, since you need proof that your wife isn't a liar!" she exclaimed.

"Please don't trouble," Hugh replied. "I take your word for the letter. It's a coincidence that it should arrive just now, on the very day I've *decided*"—he emphasised the word—"to make this change. Perhaps, however, you won't be quite so ready—truthful as you are—to assure me that you intended to invite the ladies before you heard what was being done here!"

For an instant Sandie was speechless. Then, between breaths words came brokenly.

"Oh—how *dare* you—how *dare* you suggest that I made up my mind to have them here—just to *spite* you!"

Hugh laughed.

" 'How dare you' has always seemed to me rather a ridiculous expression," he said. "It appeals to my sense of humour. You used to have one once. It was one of your charms. But apparently you've lost it, among other things I admired in those days. It's quite easy to 'dare' things, my dear girl! You say you're not afraid of me, and I believe it. Why should

you be? And you can hardly suppose that I'm afraid of you?"

Sandie was "out of herself." She didn't care what she said now, if only she could say something that might hurt Hugh Ffrench.

"You accused me of not fearing God or the devil!" she choked. "You judge by yourself. You judge me wrongly. But you I judge *right!* You 'dare' to insult me because you want me to go out of the house and make way for—your *mistress!*"

Even as she spoke the shameful word, made the hateful accusation, she was terrified—not so much of what Hugh might do to her as of herself, and the precipice in life upon whose brink she suddenly found herself trembling.

They had stood at some distance apart, but one step brought Hugh to her side. He seized both arms, not knowing, perhaps, what force he used; and Sandie would have died sooner than wince.

"Now you are lying, and you know it well!" he said. "Whatever you may have done to throw away my love, I've been true to you in act and thought. Not for your sake, perhaps, but for my own self-respect, and for the sake of that little child whom you neglect, and even I have often forgotten—though I won't forget again. I've never insulted you, and I'll not allow you to insult me, still less an innocent girl under our roof—a girl who is my sister's friend—a girl I never saw till yesterday."

"You *say* you never saw her till then!" Sandie taunted. "But if that's true, by Jove, you're a quick worker, changing the whole house already for her pleasure! Oh, I tell you I won't have it. I've cabled to my cousin. If she can't come, I'll go. I'll stay with her in an hotel, and I'll let every one know why."

Hugh's smile was like a smile on a mask.

"You will stay in this house while you remain my wife," he said.

"Not with that woman here!" Sandie defied him, with set teeth. So speaking, she realised that Fate had decided her future.

"Not only will you stay while Miss Dolarro has charge of Fay as her governess, but you will withdraw that vile word you used," Hugh said. "That is, you'll do so if you and I are to go on as husband and wife. If not——" he did not end the sentence, but, leaving it unfinished, made it the more expressive.

Yes, Fate had decided! But, instead of finding relief in the decision, Sandie felt utterly lost, abandoned. It was true, then, as she had thought! Hugh hated her. He *wanted* her to be gone, and leave him free. Very well! she would go. But she would take Fay with her, and then Hugh would have no excuse to keep Miss Dolarro. Guilty, or innocent, he would be obliged to send the girl away, at all events until—until there should be a divorce. After that—oh, she needn't think yet what would happen to her and to Hugh after that. There was enough to worry about at the mo-

ment. How to get Fay out of the house, for instance.

That would be difficult, because Hugh wouldn't consent to part with the child. Even if he didn't want her for himself, she was the important link between him and the governess. But, Sandie reasoned, surely a *girl*-child would belong to the mother? Vaguely she remembered in divorce cases that the boys were given to the father, girls to the mother. Once she had Fay safely in her possession, it didn't seem possible that the law could take the child away. It would be a wonderful adventure to steal Fay—for it would amount to stealing her—and what a revenge upon Hugh!

These thoughts whirled through Sandie's brain in a few fevered seconds. They were wild thoughts, and thrilled her more than Derek Leavenworth's love-making had ever thrilled her. But she saw that they must be tamed before they could be turned to practical use as ideas. She must give up the empty pleasure of bandying words with Hugh. She mustn't let him guess what she—and Fate—had settled in this brief moment since his ultimatum.

Instead of crying out, "We won't go on as husband and wife! I shall leave you this very hour!" as she longed to do, Sandie twitched her shoulders like a pettish child, and pouted:

"Oh, if you are so *virtuous,* I'll take back that word —for the present. By and by we shall see. We shall see a whole heap of things!"

With that seeming concession she turned away, and walked firmly out of the room, sure that Hugh would scorn to follow. He would suppose that he had conquered her, and would return to the decorator person, delighted with his success. Well, let him enjoy it for a little while. It wouldn't be many hours before he found out that it was she who had triumphed. As she ran downstairs (in her excitement it was impossible to move slowly) she remembered Derek Leavenworth. Now that she had actually resolved to leave Hugh, and was planning to take Fay, Derry became a complication. What should she do about him? It had been great fun, and very romantic, leading Derry on to believe that she would go away with him, and she had more than half meant to keep what she called her "promise"—that is, if she ever *did* leave home. There had always been a bigger "if" than she had realised, Sandie saw, now that she had so suddenly and unexpectedly come to the jumping-off place.

Of course, if she didn't go to Derry, he would follow her, and never let her alone. It would be just as bad for her, with *people,* as if she had run away with him. Everybody would whisper "Camouflage!" Besides, to be living apart from her husband and not divorced would have many drawbacks as a scheme of life. Better be divorced, perhaps, and later on, when she was middle-aged, perhaps, become a marchioness. To be a marchioness was *so* respectable! Still, if she waited patiently, she might pose as the injured party—

because of this Nina creature—and divorce Hugh. Oh, well, she couldn't make up her mind all the way round in a few moments. The thing was, she had decided to go, and as a sensational *coup* to steal Fay.

Almost mechanically she stopped at the door of the nursery, opened it, and peeped in. Fay was sitting on Miss Dolarro's lap, in a big chair between a cheerful grate fire and the window. There were big, moon-like white chrysanthemums in a tall vase, on a table nearby, and Sandie wondered whence they came. Somehow, she had never thought of providing flowers in the nursery, though she had gifts every day of more than she knew what to do with, besides those that were ordered for the drawing-room and dining-room.

The very way in which Miss Dolarro looked up seemed to Sandie a challenge. There was surprise in it, as if the mistress of the house ought to have knocked; nevertheless, the girl got up, showing all outward marks of respect.

"I am giving Fay a lesson in French," she explained. "She's keen to learn. See, I have "Æsop's Fables," with nice illustrations. She doesn't know them, it seems. But oh, Lady Ffrench, what extraordinary progress she has made in reading, though she says she's never had any regular lessons since her A B C!"

This was news to Sandie, but she didn't confess it.

"I learned to read, too, when I was a mere baby—no one ever quite knew how," she announced. "Fay

evidently takes after me. Yes, a very nice picture-book? But you haven't got settled into your routine yet, I suppose? So it won't upset the programme if I invite Fay to go for a little walk with me?"

Nina hesitated. She remembered Lord Derek Leavenworth's instructions as to how it would be wise to treat Lady Ffrench, with a view to furthering *his* interests. Among other things, she was to win the Butterfly's confidence, and to play upon her grievance against Sir Hugh whenever possible.

"Oh, dear Lady Ffrench, I should love to say 'Yes, do take her!' But—but the fact is, Sir Hugh has had Fay out already for quite a tramp, and—and he said that he thought she'd had enough exercise for this morning. Still, if you think—what *do* you think we'd better do?"

"You were with them?" Sandie asked sharply.

"Yes," admitted Nina. "Sir Hugh didn't plan at first to come back to the house. So of course I had to go. He changed his mind afterwards, remembering about the decorator he wanted to see."

"Oh, and he bought us these lovely flowers!" added Fay, gazing rapturously at the chrysanthemums. "Mrs. McClellan and I never had any flowers here."

"Would you *like* to come out with me, and p'r'aps get some wonderful American ice-cream soda?" Sandie tempted the child.

Fay clapped her hands. Of course she would like to go, though she really was a little tired—they had

walked so far, and taken such long steps. But suddenly there was father, standing in the doorway, with an air of having heard, and of disapproving.

"I think if I were you, Sandie, I wouldn't break up Fay's lessons at this time in the morning, just when she's begun so well. It will get her into bad habits," Hugh said.

Fay was sorry for the pretty Princess, for she looked so—well, she *looked* cross; but, as father had spoken so nicely, she couldn't be exactly cross, only disappointed, the child supposed. Anyhow, Sandie walked away, merely murmuring:

"Is it any worse for me to interrupt the lessons than for you to do it?"

"I had no intention of coming in until I heard your invitation to Fay as I passed the half-open door," Sir Hugh defended himself. At this Sandie shrugged her shoulders ungraciously and went on, without turning round.

The French lesson didn't continue as well as it had begun, for some reason, though father didn't stay, and Fay was glad when it was luncheon-time. She and Nina were to go down to the dining-room together, Sir Hugh had said during the walk, and he would be there—perhaps Sandie, too.

Fay didn't quite believe that the last part of the prophecy would come true, because of the way Sandie had looked when she left the nursery. But at least she hadn't gone out! She stood near the door of her

own bedroom when Fay and Nina passed down the corridor hand-in-hand, after the Japanese gong had sent out its fairy-like notes.

"Come here a minute, Fay!" the Princess called. "I have something for you. She shall be with you again in a minute, Miss Dolarro."

Nina smiled acquiescence, and let the little hand go.

Fay ran to her mother, who drew her hastily into the beautiful, eccentric room.

"Little one, can you keep a secret—a big secret?" Sandie whispered, bending down, trying to hide the excitement in her voice.

CHAPTER XII

A SECRET—a big secret!"

Fay was enchanted.

"Oh, yes, darling Sandie!" she assured the sweet-scented Princess. "I won't tell any one, not even father, if you don't want me to."

"I don't want you to," the vision answered, "nor the magnificent Nina you love so much."

"I don't think I do love her so *very* much—yet—really," Fay reflected aloud. "I don't know why I don't, 'cause she's lovely. But I don't. And I do love you. I've known you such a long time."

"Well, then, I can count on you," Sandie said. "We're in this together, you and I. Just now I haven't time to explain, but you're a very clever little girl, and very brave, I know, from the way you behaved the other night. Tell me quickly—can you read writing as well as you read print?"

"Not quite," Fay had to confess. "I've never had many letters of my own, only a few from Peter Arden, Lady Woolworth's nice nephew, a little older than me, you know. The one who's a 'Sir,' already, like father. But they're nice letters; they help me to learn writing, because I want to see what they say."

At any other time Sandie would have shrieked with

laughter at the thought of Fay, at seven, receiving "love-letters" from Sir Peter Arden, aged ten, unknown to her parents. But the Butterfly was in no mood to think of any affairs save her own. In her haste and suppressed excitement she hardly heard what Fay said.

"Here's a letter," she whispered, taking a sealed envelope from the large gold-mesh bag that dangled from her arm. "It's for you from me. If you can read what's written outside, you can read the rest. It's almost as plain as print. I took a lot of trouble to make it so."

"It says: 'For my daughter—for her to read when she's alone,' " Fay repeated out aloud.

"Good! You mustn't let any one see you reading the letter, and you must hide it, and what's enclosed in it, afterwards. Then you must do exactly what the letter tells you to do, even if it seems very difficult. Where can you put the envelope now?"

"Inside the neck of my dress," said Fay promptly. She had never had a real secret before, and it seemed almost sly and wrong to be hiding something from her wonderful father. But it *couldn't* be wrong when Sandie told her to do it, and "counted on her because she was brave!"

"You're sure the letter won't drop out?" Sandie anxiously inquired.

"I'll fix it so it can't."

"Hurry, then! And try to behave just as usual

downstairs. I don't want them to suspect anything like this—anything secret between us. And here's a little ring for you, dear baby. I said before Miss Dolarro that I had something to give you. You can show her this. It's tight for my smallest finger, so it ought to fit one of your biggest. But don't stop now; put it on as you go downstairs. I'm not coming to lunch."

Fay was sorry that Sandie wasn't coming to lunch, but what with the letter and the ring, and being trusted with a "big secret," she had not much time to spare for regrets. When the letter had been safely disposed of inside her frock, the child admired the ring on her way downstairs. It was a heart made from one small cabochon ruby, surrounded with tiny diamonds and set in a thin platinum band.

She had often seen it on the little finger of Sandie's left hand, and admired it there. Sandie had told her once that the ring had been the prettiest of her birthday gifts when she was twelve, a ruby being her "birth-stone." Fay didn't know at all what a "birth-stone" was, but she knew that she was going to love this one. The platinum band wasn't much too big for her middle finger. She could wear it without having it changed.

Neither Sir Hugh nor Nina seemed to find it particularly strange that Sandie shouldn't be coming down to luncheon, nor were they greatly grieved by her absence. Sir Hugh showed little interest in the ring,

which disappointed Fay, though Nina was kind and enthusiastic. Father didn't, indeed, appear even to like talking of Sandie or hearing Fay and Nina talk of her. He changed the subject impatiently, and inquired if Miss Dolarro would care to have a "kindergarten school outfit" for her charge.

Miss Dolarro thought she would enjoy teaching "'rithmetic" by that method, but in some things the child seemed amazingly advanced, far past the kindergarten stage. The two chatted together about Fay, and that would have been very interesting to the child herself if she hadn't been wild for a chance to read Sandie's letter.

Already she had decided how and when this was to be managed. After luncheon (which was her dinner) Fay would be taken upstairs for a nap. She would find a chance to slip the letter out of her frock and under her pillow before Nina was ready to help change her into a wrapper, for the prescribed hour's rest. After that she would be safe, for once she had been left alone with the curtains drawn, Nina would not return till the hour had come to an end.

The great difficulty during the meal was in obeying Sandie's instructions to "behave just as usual." Hugh remarked on the smallness of her appetite, the redness of her cheeks, the brilliance of her eyes, and asked Miss Dolarro if she thought the child could be feverish. He hoped she hadn't walked too far and got tired out, in the morning.

Miss Dolarro soothed his fears. She fancied that Fay was only a little excited at having Sir Hugh lunch with her, a treat which, she imagined, the child rarely got (she might have said "never" except for yesterday, without straying from the truth); and perhaps—with a lovely laugh—it was a tiny bit agitating to have a new governess.

Consequently, Hugh forgave Fay for not stuffing herself in the way that seemed proper to him for growing children, and at last the programme planned in the child's mind began to enact itself. After lingering far longer than Fay in her impatience could have wished, Miss Dolarro rose from the table and took a tiny, hot hand in one of her long white ones.

Nina's hands were remarkably perfect, almost too perfect, with their delicate fingers tapering so that, with the pink oval nails, they seemed quite pointed at the ends. One saw just such hands in old pictures, and portraits of women who had lived long, long ago; but they didn't seem to be right, somehow, in modern times, or even *real*. Fay wondered if it was because of Miss Dolarro's hands that she couldn't love her very much, or feel at home or *cosy* with her.

They left Sir Hugh smoking a cigarette, as he had asked Miss Dolarro's permission to do; and he had opened the door for them, as if they were two grand ladies. They went upstairs together, Nina telling Fay what a pleasant afternoon they would have after that refreshing nap was over.

Then everything happened as the child had planned. While Miss Dolarro found the wrapper (she wasn't quite accustomed to her charge's things and their places yet) Fay unpinned the letter and slid it under her pillow. There was an alarming instant when the child feared that Miss Dolarro had turned round too soon; but the saint-like face was calm, the big eyes even a little absent-minded, as if Nina's thoughts might be far away, as indeed they were—dividing themselves between the room where Sir Hugh Ffrench was smoking—thinking, perhaps, of her—and a house in Surrey where another man *ought* to be thinking of her.

Soon Fay was wrapped in her little, soft woollen dressing-gown. She lay on the bed, under a light eiderdown. The drawn curtains gave to the room a premature dusk. The child looked like an earth-bound cherub, ready for dreams of its native paradise; but dreams were in reality the furthest thing from her thoughts. The instant that Nina had gently closed the door, leaving her alone, she drew Sandie's sealed letter from under the pillow.

"Darling," she read in the clear, blue-black writing, which Sandie had tried to "make like print," *"you love your father, I know, and I don't want you not to love him, but please love me better;* because he has others to love him, and just now I have nobody except you. I want nobody except you. I need you very

much. But you will have to choose between your father and me, because he doesn't wish me to stay in his house any more. He wishes me to go, and never to see me again, so I am going. I shall be gone before you read this, without anybody knowing, except Hortense. I have to tell her, but she will keep the secret, as I'm sure *you* will. Later, probably, I shall send for her; but I haven't quite made up my mind yet what will be best. The one thing I am sure of is that I want you and need you, and if you can come to me you may save me from a lot of foolishness and trouble.

"If your father or Miss Dolarro find out what you are going to do—for I know you will do it, for my sake—they will keep you at home. That's *certain*. So you must be careful. I can't trust even Hortense to help you, for she is in a very nervous, excited state about me, and she might lose her head. None of the other servants can be trusted, either, though you may like them and think that they are kind.

"As soon as you can—at once, if possible—slip out of the house without *any one seeing you*. The little envelope I have put inside the letter has some money in it for you to show to a taxi-man when you get far enough away from the house not to be spied on from any window. And there's a card in it, too, with an address. Tell the taxi-man to bring you there. He will, when he sees the money. Don't answer any questions he may ask, except that you can say your mother has sent for you and told you just what to do. You

will find me waiting for you at the place, and, dear little thing, I'll try to make up to you for sacrificing your father for me. You will keep me good, and I'll keep you happy.

"I shall be in a hurry for you to come, and so anxious till you do. Your loving SANDIE.

P. S.—Please burn this—or bring it with you for me to burn, which will perhaps be better."

It was a simple and rather childish letter, but Fay was no critic. All her heart went out to Sandie. Sandie was unhappy! Sandie thought that she wasn't wanted at home?

Fay couldn't believe that Hugh didn't *want* Sandie, even though he was very, very nice to the new governess whom Sandie didn't like. The child longed to run to her father and ask him; but, even though it seemed as if that *must* make things come right, because Hugh was really so wise and kind, she mustn't let herself be tempted. She had promised Sandie to keep a "big secret," and this was it.

Just as Sandie wrote, there was a very small envelope enclosed in the letter. It was not stuck, and Fay found inside a new pound-note wrapped round a visiting-card. This card wasn't Sandie's own. It was that of a lady whom Fay knew by name and sight—Mrs. Harry Reynolds—a tall, slim pretty American who came sometimes to the house for intimate talks alone with Sandie. If by chance Fay were in the

room with her mother when Mrs. Reynolds called, Sandie promptly sent her out. The child had heard Nurse speak of the lady to Hortense, dusting photographs in Sandie's bedroom, of which the French maid had partial charge. Nurse had known the lady in America. She was a "celebrity," "a professional," and a *"divorcée,"* whatever those things were!

On the card was engraved "Mrs. Harry Reynolds, 91a, Jermyn Street, St. James's, S.W.," and that was the place, evidently, where Sandie wished Fay to go "at once."

The child's heart was heavy, and she could not keep the tears from rising to her eyes. The salt drops fell over her cheeks, and she had no time to wipe them away, she was hurrying so fast. Oh, and she hated to hurry, for there had been dreadful words in Sandie's letter:

"You must choose between your father and me."

It seemed from this sentence, underscored in the letter, that Sandie didn't mean to have her come back ever again. Yet she loved her father so much! She had always admired him and prayed for him to notice her. Now that prayer had been answered, as all her prayers seemed to be lately, in a miraculous way. It did seem cruel that at the very time when he had begun to care about her, even to want her with him, she must steal out of the house, not even speaking to him beforehand, or having one good-bye kiss to remember.

Still, the child felt bound in honour to do what

Sandie asked—poor, pretty Sandie, who "needed" her —even though, deep down in her heart, Fay felt guiltily that she loved Hugh a little—just a *little*—better even than Sandie.

She got up at once, took off the soft slippers that matched the dressing-gown, and with some difficulty buttoned up a pair of high boots which Miss Dolarro had neatly "treed" with smart, miniature trees such as grown-ups use. The dress was even worse, for it fastened at the back and had an intricate sash to tie. Finally Fay had to compromise by leaving all the buttons undone except those at the top, and tying the sash "anyhow." She covered up deficiencies with a white fur coat of which she was very fond. There was a toque that went with it, also gloves, but the gloves Fay couldn't find.

What, after all, did gloves matter? She was taking no clothes, because Sandie had said nothing about clothes, nor any belongings at all. Indeed, Fay had no toys which she dearly loved, as other children love their playthings. She felt that, of all the home treasures, she would miss the books in the library most, especially Shakespeare. Shakespeare had brought her and Hugh together; introduced them, so to speak!

Cautiously she opened the door and peeped out into the hall. It was empty and quiet—quiet as it never was for long when Sandie was at home. Where Nina might be Fay couldn't guess; but if she were in her own room next door, at least she hadn't heard any

sound, or she would surely have looked in to find out why her charge was moving about in the sleep-hour.

Fay told herself that now speed was more needed than caution. When she had noiselessly closed the door of her room she ran fast along the corridor, sped downstairs, and paused only for a second at the bottom to make sure that no servant was in sight.

Good! The way was clear. Luncheon wasn't long over, and when there were no guests, this was a restful time of day—no coming and going; servants busy in the dining-room, putting silver away, sending dishes down to the kitchen—and the dining-room door was well out of sight from this front hall.

So far, so good. But now Fay had to wrestle with and overcome the greatest obstacle—if it *could* be overcome—the intricacies of the door.

She had never before even tried to open it for herself. There were several small knobs that had to be turned or pulled back when the "catch" was down, and they were high up, almost out of Fay's reach. But she stood on tiptoe, and made valiant efforts. The thing simply had to be done!

Fay's forehead under the white fur toque grew moist and warm with her efforts, and fear that they would prove useless—that she might fail her mother. At any minute now some one might come, and as she mustn't tell where she was going or why, she would be reported to Miss Dolarro as a very naughty little girl. She threw frightened glances over her shoulder

at every imagined sound, and suddenly her eyes fixed themselves upon a hall chair. With that she could easily deal with the highest placed knob—the one which so far had baffled her efforts.

The chair of carved oak, with a high back, seemed immensely heavy to Fay; but, half-carrying, half-dragging the great thing, she got it near the door. An instant later the difficulties were overcome, the door yielded to an "Open, Sesame," and Fay, panting, breathless, was outside in the cool fresh air. Almost, but not quite, she forgot to shut the door after her. It *would* make a noise in shutting, because she had to give it a slam. The child darted away so fast, however, that even if a servant came into the front hall and looked out in fear of an escaped "sneak-thief," she would have gone beyond range of vision.

The child didn't stop running until she had turned a corner into another street, where she felt temporarily safe. But even there her heart beat fast. It was so strange to be waiting all alone for a taxi. Suppose, when one came, and she waved to the chauffeur to stop, he should think it a joke and drive on? Perhaps no taxi would pause for such a little girl. What should she do then?

CHAPTER XIII

NINA DOLARRO looked out of her window when the front door slammed, because she wondered if it was Sir Hugh Ffrench who had gone out. If so, it would be a blow to her vanity. At luncheon he had promised to show her some war photographs before it was time for Fay to wake up, and she had expected a summons to the library before long.

If he had gone, it would mean he had forgotten not only the promise, but her, and that she was mistaken in thinking she had made a very strong impression upon him. She had worked so hard to make it, too! And (she thought) she had been clever, really subtle, that morning, out walking with him and Fay, also again at luncheon.

She had tried to find out what he cared about most, and had then talked of it, showing off her intelligence and sympathy in a way which must suggest to his mind a contrast between her and his self-centred butterfly of a wife. She had displayed quite a knowledge of the coal-mining industry (she'd got hold of a useful book in the library and "fagged it up"); then, discovering through a few words dropped by chance that Lady Ffrench and her friends "wanted to forget there'd ever been a war," Nina seized upon the sub-

ject. There was nothing which so appealed to her! She didn't see how people *could* "forget." She drew out one or two stories of his adventures from a reluctant yet faintly flattered Hugh, and had fancied him pleased with an excuse for securing a half-hour with her when he consented to show those old snapshots of historic scenes.

The funny part was that *she* had been pleased, too —pleased in a way quite different from the hope of reaching an ambitious goal. She *liked* him! The prospect of being alone with the man for a few minutes had stirred her blood—and that was more than she'd expected when answering Miss Mary Ffrench's telegram the other day.

For a long time she had been closely associated with one man who was too poor to marry a poor girl, just as she was too beautiful to waste her youth without securing a millionaire or a man of title. She had thought of it as a sacrifice of romance, to marry Mary Ffrench's brother if she could "get" him. But already, after these few hours in his society, she had lost the "sacrifice" point of view. Hugh Ffrench was a *man*. He attracted her. Soon it would be hard not to like him a little too well, even if he hadn't one of the oldest titles in England, and that wonderful coal-mine in Yorkshire which poured out tons of money.

Besides, it would be too delicious to snatch him away from that conceited little fool of a Sandie, who had snubbed her so rudely on two occasions.

If he had gone, forgetting, why——

But, he wasn't visible in the street. The only persons to be seen were an old man, a fat, elderly woman, and a small girl in a white coat and toque.

Nina couldn't see much of the child except the top of her head, a sketchy suggestion of white fur, and of floating golden hair. But the little she could see resembled Fay—and Fay *had* white furs, she knew.

It must be only a chance likeness, of course. Fay's seemed to be an almost painfully frank, sincere young soul. Nevertheless, Nina hastily though softly opened the door communicating with the child's bedroom and looked in.

The curtains were still drawn, making a pensive twilight. There was perfect stillness—not even the gentle sound of a sleeper's regular breaths—but the bed was turned in such a way that Nina had to enter the room before she could be sure whether or not the bird had taken flight.

"Well! Sly little thing!" she said aloud when she saw that nothing was left of Fay on the bed save a hastily flung down dressing-gown of blue lamb's wool.

Miss Dolarro was so surprised and "intrigued" by her discovery that she ceased to be glad it wasn't Sir Hugh who had given her the slip. What *could* this escapade of Fay's mean? She even wondered if the child ever walked in her sleep.

"I suppose I must run out and bring her back, any-

how," Nina told herself. "That's the only thing to do."

She crushed a soft hat over her hair, and got into her coat as she was hurrying downstairs. At the door she saw the tell-tale chair, which no servant had yet observed, and guessed at once the reason why it was so peculiarly placed. Those high-up knobs that had to be turned to lift the catch! Evidently the child had been determined to get out at all costs. And no one in the house had been called on to aid in the plot for escape, or whatever it was.

Nina wished very much that she *knew* what it was, for the thing began to look very odd, more odd than the mere whim of a spoilt child, such as Sandie Ffrench's daughter was sure to be.

It occurred to her, also, that if there were something mysterious under Fay's freak it would be as well for *her* to discover its meaning, before anyone else began even to guess. She put the big chair back in its own nook, therefore, before she hurried out into the street, taking the direction in which the white-furred vision had gone.

Despite her quick decision and quick action, however, five or six minutes had passed since Nina had found Fay's bed unoccupied. The quiet street round the corner was empty as far as the eye could see, and it was clear that the child had done one of two things —either she had been let into some house near by, or

else she had been carried off—willingly or unwillingly —in a taxi or private car.

A theory began to form in Nina's subtle Italian brain, but she could do nothing to prove or disprove it without returning home, and for the moment abandoning the search. She must learn whether Lady Ffrench were in or not, and, if out, she must get hold of something more than the obvious fact of absence.

A latchkey had been given the new governess this morning, and thoughtfully she let herself into the house. Upstairs she met one of the two footmen. "Sir Hugh's compliments, and would Miss Dolarro kindly go to the library?"

"Please tell Sir Hugh that I will be down in five minutes," she answered, and, when his back was turned, tapped at the door of Lady Ffrench's bedroom.

Hortense opened it, and it struck Nina that the Frenchwomen had a worried air. Miss Dolarro took her cue from it, for "desperate remedies" must be used to cure "diseases desperate grown," and she had very little time to work, if she were not to disappoint Sir Hugh of their interview.

"Lady Ffrench is not at home, is she?" was the first question in the coming catechism that Nina flung in the face of Hortense.

"No, mademoiselle, she is not," echoed the maid.

Then Nina let herself go.

"Oh, Hortense!" she exclaimed. "A *very* unpleasant thing has happened! I've had a letter from—from

a person who doesn't love Lady Ffrench. You see, several people know I'm a friend of Sir Hugh's sister, and she and Lady Ffrench—well, perhaps they don't quite understand each other always. If I could do good to Lady Ffrench I would. She is so young and pretty! And she's Fay's mother. I love Fay. Oh, do tell me something which will help me to disprove the statement that she—that she has—I hardly know how to say it! But *you* want to save her from scandal, don't you?"

"I do not see how scandal can touch miladi," valiantly retorted Hortense; but a greenish pallor was spreading over her face such as sicklies an olive skin at sea, in a storm. "Mademoiselle is very kind, but——"

"Oh, *please* believe that I really mean to be!" entreated Nina, looking an angel of beauty and goodness. "This letter—well, it says that Lord Derek Leavenworth—— It would be too dreadful if it's true, for I should feel it was partly *my* fault. Lady Ffrench, I'm afraid, was very angry this morning about those rooms upstairs, and she might have——"

"Miladi has only gone to visit a friend of hers, a Mrs. Harry Reynolds," snapped Hortense. "It is not my affair to talk of miladi's business! She has the right to go and come as she pleases, I suppose, without questions being asked. Still, if mademoiselle wishes to do her a kindness—or even if she doesn't, and wishes the contrary—it can but do more good

than harm for it to be told that she is with a lady—a well-known lady like Madame Reynolds. Mademoiselle or Mees Ffrench or any one can ring up the flat on the telephone, to inquire if I speak the truth. Not that I would have told even this much if mademoiselle hadn't put it in such a way, so I was forced to defend miladi."

"Indeed, indeed you have done right—good and not harm, as you say," cried Miss Dolarro. "All trouble for Lady Ffrench can be put an end to now, just through this one little statement of yours. But you had better tell me, if you can, whether she will be back to-day—or, anyhow, quite soon, or whether——"

"That I do not know," cut in Hortense, looking obstinate. "Madame Reynolds, I understand, is seek. Miladi may stay for a little time and nurse her."

Nina could almost have laughed out aloud at the picture of Sandie Ffrench—the "Butterfly"—nursing a sick friend. It was *too* funny! But Hortense had no sense of humour. Miss Dolarro merely smiled her most sympathetic smile, as she accepted the French maid's statement, and thanked her again.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE was something else almost more funny to her than the thought of Sandie Ffrench playing nurse. This was Hortense's rightness in saying that Mrs. Harry Reynolds was a "well-known lady."

She was well-known, indeed, especially to one who had been in America. A girl of good family—perhaps a slightly older friend of Melisande Morgan at some fashionable school—she had shown herself singularly temperamental after marrying an immensely rich man. She ran away from him with a famous professional dancer named Harry Reynolds, and, when her husband secured a divorce, not only married her lover but danced with him in public. Often the two quarrelled, and on such occasions, Mrs. Harry left Mr. Harry, and sought a (comparatively) quiet retreat in England. Only the other day, down in Surrey, Nina had seen a page photograph of Mrs. Harry Reynolds in "The Tatler," with a note underneath that she had just sailed for America.

Hortense had unintentionally given it away that the lady lived in a flat when in London. It ought to be easy to find the address. Probably it would be in the telephone book. And one thing was certain. If

Sandie Ffrench had gone there, she had not gone to nurse a sick friend!

Miss Dolarro suddenly saw the episode under a bright, revealing light. In a rage Lady Ffrench had left her husband's house, and, unable to *take* Fay, had instructed the child to follow her. She must have done that just before luncheon, when she stopped her daughter on the way downstairs. The gift of the ring had been only camouflage. The Butterfly meant never to return to her husband, or to let him have Fay if she could make possession seem nine points of the law.

In a way this was a clever move, Nina saw, even if crude. It had been quickly thought out, she imagined, and Lady Ffrench had had to do the best she could, under some disadvantages. In taking the child she made it impossible for a governess—a beautiful young girl, almost a stranger to Sir Hugh Ffrench—to remain under his roof. Oh, yes, it must be admitted that was rather a smart trick to be carried out so soon and in such a rush!

It was a box on Sir Hugh's ears for his masterfulness about the rooms, and for her—Nina—it was a hard blow. She hadn't had time to do much "deadly work" with Sir Hugh yet. If only the same thing had happened a little later, she might have had cause for rejoicing. In that case, Sandie would have been removed from her path, but now she hardly *had* a path. She was just beginning to blaze a trail!

The five minutes she had given herself before go-

ing down to Sir Hugh were almost gone, but not quite. Nina still had about two minutes' thinking space, and, having got so far, the first thought she flung into that space concerned Lord Derek Leavenworth. Had this move of Lady Ffrench's anything to do with him?

For an instant Miss Dolarro hoped that it had. Sir Hugh would, in such a case, divorce his wife at once, and almost surely take his child away from her. Fay in the house again, no doubt Nina would be called back —or Fay and she would live at Miss Ffrench's where Hugh would often come to visit them.

In the next instant, however, the girl changed her mind. If Derek were with Sandie already, there was no way in which a friend—like herself, for instance—could help him. If he were not with Sandie, and didn't yet know that she had left her husband, Nina would be able to do him a great favour.

To be sure, with Lady Ffrench out of the house, and Derek openly declared her lover, it would not be in his power to injure the governess—or, rather, the *late* governess. Still, if she helped him, he might be willing to help her with money and influence, in case her present plans went wrong—and she needed all the help she could get. Her blood throbbed hard in her veins, for she began to feel optimistic, after a great "slump." Nina was a born intriguer.

Would Lady Ffrench have wanted Fay with her, if she meant immediately to summon her lover? Miss Dolarro knew little about the feelings of mothers, and

hoped never to be a mother herself, unless of an heir to some high title, but it did strike her that such conduct was not "in the mother line." She didn't believe that even a frivolous little thing like Sandie Ffrench would be capable of it.

A moment's extra thought, and it was borne in upon her that she now had plenty of time to "waste" over Sir Hugh's photographs, since time spent with him was far from a waste. If Sandie had sent for Leavenworth, it was too late for Nina Dolarro to do anything about it. If Sandie hadn't, why, she *wouldn't,* till intolerable boredom gripped her. So, if Nina could get him on the telephone in an hour or so, there'd still be time. She would, however, try to do it sooner than that. Alas! There wasn't much hope—yet—that Hugh Ffrench would manœuvre to keep her long.

She was on the stroke of the five minutes' grace when she went down to the library. The door was open, and Hugh was visible to her before she entered, as he walked up and down, smoking a cigarette. She moved so lightly that for a second he was unconscious of her nearness while she hovered outside the door. He looked anxious, and as if his thoughts were miles away. But anxiety and absent-mindedness became his type of features, giving them a kind of attractive haggardness, and recklessness, Nina thought. Oh, it wasn't going to be a mere struggle to fulfil an ambition now! She saw something more, and thrilled to it. The first act of the drama was only just begun.

She must play her part carefully if she was to be the leading woman in all the acts.

As she impressed this upon her own intelligence, Hugh turned, and threw away his troubled look as if it were a mask. At the same time his cigarette was flung into the fireplace, and with a smile he came to meet Miss Dolarro. She hoped that he meant to close the door. But he did not do that. It was left half open, as before. Nina knew that this was for her sake, yet she was disappointed. She would have liked his wish for a tête-à-tête alone with her to be stronger than his prudence. But never mind! She could wait. It was plain to see that he admired her already, and turned to her for sympathy and understanding, in quite a beautiful way, almost touching from such a man.

He showed her the snapshots of battlefields which she had begged to see, and Nina did not try to "flirt" in any obvious sense of the word. She was all sweet womanliness and charm, gently asking questions, tactfully drawing him out to tell things about his soldier life which he had never dreamed of telling to any one. Then, on the wise principle of giving too little rather than too much of her society, when they had been together for twenty minutes Nina said suddenly that she must go.

"I'd almost forgotten darling little Fay!" she exclaimed. "It's because memories of the war thrill me so! If I'd been a man I would have been deep in it!

But in a few minutes now it will be time to wake Fay. I promised not to be one single second late, for, you see, she didn't much want to go to sleep to-day. She seemed a little nervous. I do hope we didn't walk her too far! Do you think we did?"

Hugh looked down into large, appealing eyes, and gave consolation. Fay was sure to be all right. He had to go out in about ten minutes—an appointment at his club with a Yorkshire neighbour of his. In case Fay shouldn't be quite herself (though she was sure to be) he'd be glad if Miss Dolarro would call him up. He gave her the 'phone number, and Nina ran upstairs to Fay's empty room, where she would wait until Sir Hugh had gone.

Presently, watching at a half-open window, she saw him come out into the street and hail a passing taxi. Locking the door of Fay's room, for fear of intrusion, Nina returned to the library, for there was no telephone in the "nursery suite," and she dared not venture into Lady Ffrench's "den." Though the mistress of the house was absent, Hortense might penetrate there. Nobody except Sir Hugh or Fay ever went to the library, she had heard.

Calling up Derek Leavenworth, she was told by a valet that "his lordship" was out. Would she care to give her message?

No, she couldn't do that, Nina answered. It was for "his lordship's" ear alone. But it was very, very important to him—something he wouldn't miss for

anything in the world. Was he likely to return soon? Or, if not, could she reach him quickly anywhere else?

As a matter of fact, admitted the valet voice, his lordship might come in at any minute—was, indeed, overdue. Would the lady give her name and telephone number?

Nina gave both, and hardly were the words spoken when the man exclaimed:

"Ah, here is his lordship coming in now! Please hold the line."

"He was in all the time!" Nina told herself, as she waited for Leavenworth to speak.

CHAPTER XV

"I PROMISED to call you up if I had any exciting news," Nina said, lowering her voice, although the door was shut. "Now I have some—*very* exciting. Unless you know it already."

"I don't know anything exciting," answered Leavenworth. "Is it about——"

"It's about *her*. Have you heard from her to-day?"

"Not a word."

"Well, she's gone."

"The devil she has! What's up, a row?"

"Not exactly. But she was wild about Sir H— giving me a room she wanted for her own use, or anyhow didn't want me to have. He doesn't know yet that she's gone. Nobody knows except her maid, Hortense, and me. I found out by accident. She refused to come down to lunch, and must have slipped out while Sir H— and Fay and I were eating, with all the servants busy at one thing or another."

"That's not very long ago. It's only half-past three now. She'll *call* me——"

"I'm not at all sure of that. In fact, I'm pretty sure of the contrary."

"Why? What do you mean? Your voice sounds as if you mean something jolly queer."

"I do. I'm going to explain. It's quite a story. I've reason to think that she has entirely abandoned a certain idea connected with you, Lord Derek. If you want her to change her mind back again, I'll have to help you. I'm afraid I'm the only living soul who can, as things stand."

"Shall I come round and see you—now?" The voice was anxious and eager.

"No. It wouldn't do, here and in the circumstances. It might spoil everything. I know just what to advise you to do. But once I have advised you, the game will be more in your hands than mine. If I put it there, I deserve a reward, don't I?"

"You'll get it. What is it you want? Something big, I'll be bound?"

"What I may have to do for you is big, very big indeed. I may risk serious trouble, even prison. Write me out a post-dated cheque for five thousand pounds——"

"Good Lord, I owe nearly that already to a lot of beastly tradespeople, and haven't five bob in hand."

"You'll have all you need for your debts if you marry a rich wife, won't you?"

"Yes. But——"

"I realise that I may as well tear up the cheque if you don't marry such a one. And if I can't make that possible, I will tear it up. You can date the cheque a year and two months ahead if you like. Before that, Lady F. ought to be your wife. A decree *nisi*

takes six months, doesn't it? And a decree absolute, or whatever you call it, before corespondent and respondent can legally marry, takes another six, I believe. Well, if that calculation's correct, and if I do my part well to-day, I should say the wedding bells can ring one year and one week from this date. Will you trust me enough to write that cheque and send it round to me by messenger now? Because I swear to you that in a few more hours it may be too late even for me to help."

"Yes—Shylock! I will. Hang it—and you."

Nina laughed into the telephone. "As soon as I get your letter, etc., I'll call you up again, with instructions what to do; so stay in, and wait."

"I will. You'll have something from me delivered at the door in fifteen minutes at latest."

"All right! Thanks. The quicker the better for your own sake. Good-bye!"

* * * * *

Fay had had no difficulty in securing a taxi. Not more than a minute had passed after turning the corner in comparative safety, when she saw a green car approaching with its flag up. She signalled timidly; the driver hesitated, suspecting a joke, as she had feared; but a pound-note waved expressively brought him to a stop.

"Does your mother know you're out?" the man chaffed the small girl in white fur; but Fay solemnly answered, "She's sent for me."

Mrs. Harry Reynolds's card was produced, and a few minutes later the child was receiving her change and "giving her driver a tip" in front of 91a, Jermyn Street.

"Many a meaner tip than that I've had from the female sex," the chauffeur chuckled, pocketing the extra shilling. "Been well brought up, that kid!"

It would be some time before he was likely to forget the picture of his youngest fare; the small hand waving a new note; the white-clad figure, the blowing mass of pale gold hair, and the grave eyes, too serious for the delicate, wild-rose face.

Number 91a had a smart lift, but at the moment there was no attendant, and, too inexperienced to touch the electric bell, Fay walked upstairs. Had she been taken up in the lift, many things might have turned out differently later on.

On each landing the child peered eagerly at the cards or plates on the doors, and on the third floor was relieved to see the name of "Mrs. Harry Reynolds." She rang, and after a short delay the door was opened by an elderly woman. This was the wife of the janitor who had been appealed to by Lady Ffrench to light fires, air the flat, and get in food.

"Mrs. Reynolds isn't at home," the woman informed the child whose arrival caused her some surprise.

"I've come to see my mother," the young caller announced. "My name is Fay—Fay Ffrench."

"Oh!" was the non-committal response. "Well, wait a minute and I'll see if it's all right."

It was a little disconcerting to have the door shut in your face! Yet Fay waited not only a minute, but several minutes.

Sandie had forgotten to tell Mrs. Sutton that she was expecting her daughter. As a matter of fact, she had not supposed that Fay would arrive so soon. She —Sandie—always had Jill Reynolds's key when Jill was out of London. Not that she ever used the flat herself, but Jill had done some small favours for her, and in return she posted letters to Jill at an address which Mrs. Harry Reynolds didn't wish the janitor and his wife to know. The former was a man of scrupulous honesty, who boasted that he, "like George Washington, never told a lie." This made him extremely dangerous if one wished a secret kept; and his wife was dangerous in another way. Jill Reynolds was sure that she could be tempted by any worth-while bribe.

Both Suttons had often seen Lady Ffrench, but neither knew her name; and Sandie had never spoken to either of the couple, save for a "Good-morning" until to-day. Jill had taken with her the French maid who was the one servant she employed in the flat, and the gloom of the place struck Sandie like a blow. So used to perfect comfort and service was the "Butterfly," that she took them for granted, as though they "came" like the air one breathed. And it was

only after arriving at the closed and darkened flat, that she realised her need of help.

In the first forlorn moments she thought of telephoning for Hortense to rush to the rescue, quite contrary to plan. But to do this would almost surely "give away" her whereabouts to the whole household. Some one other than Hortense would answer the 'phone, hear her ladyship's voice, and "listen in" to the message. If that happened, good-bye to the hope of escaping with Fay, and getting on board a ship, perhaps, before those at home guessed what had become of the child!

After a few moments of mental confusion, Sandie had somewhat reluctantly summoned Mrs. Sutton, whose "face she had never liked." Women had no right to look like animals, especially foxes! She had, however, still avoided giving her name to the janitor's wife; and at Mrs. Sutton's announcement—"A little Miss Ffrench has arrived, madam, who says you're her mother," the blood sprang to Sandie's cheeks. She was conscious of the blush, and conscious of the woman's eyes upon it. Probably most of Mrs. Harry Reynolds's visitors had something or other in their "pasts" which they would like to conceal!

"Silly of me not to go to the door myself!" Sandie thought. "And I might have put into the letter for Fay, that she must call herself 'Smith' or something. I would have done it, if I'd had a rabbit's brains! But

it's too late to worry now. And, anyhow, why should there be anything to worry about?"

"It's all right. Bring Miss Ffrench in," she said rather crossly. And almost instantly Fay ran into her arms.

"You darling!" Sandie exclaimed. "You absolute darling, and clever little mouse to get away so soon! Now you're safely here, you and I will go——" She stopped suddenly, and glanced through the half-open door which led into Mrs. Harry Reynolds's elaborate bedroom, a miniature copy of Marie Antoinette's chamber in the Trianon. Mrs. Sutton was there, putting sheets on the bed, in case "the lady" decided to stop all night. There was no need for the door to be open, but if the visitor bounced up and banged it shut, as she felt tempted to do, the fox-faced woman was sure to listen at the keyhole, out of spite. Besides, one couldn't afford to offend the creature.

"We'll go shopping," Sandie amended. "I must see about trains and ships and things. So I won't take off your hat and coat."

When she had given a few directions to Mrs. Sutton, and was in the street with Fay, waiting for a taxi, Sandie felt suddenly gay and very young.

Strange how one's mood changed! Only a little while ago she had been unhappy, as if she had come to the end of everything. But this was going to be rather fun, after all, running away from Hugh with Fay! And the reason for her sudden spurt of joy was

(perhaps) because there was nothing irrevocable in this new plan—nothing that made one a bad woman. Being so delighted to see Fay must mean that she wasn't a bit in love with Derek Leavenworth really. By carrying Fay off to America—or somewhere—she would be cutting loose from all complications with Derek, as well as all bonds with Hugh. Why, it was like being a young girl again, when she could change her mind ten times a day if she wished, without any one daring to scold her, or could dart away to the world's end at an hour's notice.

When she had hailed a taxi, she told the chauffeur to go to Cook's in Piccadilly. There she found she could get a state room on board a quick ship sailing for New York the next Saturday. No, on second thought, she wanted two state rooms adjoining. She gave no explanation of the change, but there must be a cabin for Hortense or Fay.

Even this could be accomplished by Cook, it seemed! But—Oh, Sandie hadn't money enough with her to pay for the tickets, or even a proper deposit. She had only her cheque book. Wouldn't a cheque do as well as money? What a bother to wait, just because she had no one at hand who could identify her! Well, let the cheque be sent to the bank, then. What! the bank was closed for the day? Oh, how stupid! How boring and inconvenient everything was. She simply couldn't wait till to-morrow morning! (There was no real reason why she shouldn't, except that

Sandie hated to be thwarted.) What if she left her gold bag, studded with diamonds and sapphires, as security? It was worth at least three hundred pounds, as any one could see.

Finally, it was arranged that the tickets should be sent to Lady Ffrench at 91a, Jermyn Street, in the course of an hour or two. Sandie was pleased; but once more in the taxi which she had kept, she became pensive. Should she send for Hortense, or "shed" her "while the shedding was good?" Hortense was faithful if sometimes indiscreet through losing her head. But she was getting on in life, and had a temper. Often Sandie thought she would like an excuse to change. Here was the excuse. Hortense hated the sea, and was worse than useless in a storm.

"I can write her a good cheque so she can go home to Paris," Sandie reflected. "It would really be better for her in the end, even if she feels a little hurt at first. As for getting her to send me clothes—too dangerous, now I have Fay to hide! It will be fun to buy enough things for us both, to last till we get to New York."

She had told the chauffeur to drive to Jermyn Street. Now, however, she leaned from the window and gave a different order, blissfully unconscious that she had changed the whole course of her future by lingering in Bond Street instead of returning directly to Mrs. Reynolds's flat.

CHAPTER XVI

DEREK LEAVENWORTH kept his word; and the post-dated cheque for five thousand pounds (to be destroyed if he didn't marry Melisande Ffrench) reached Nina Dolarro within fifteen minutes.

She was all ready to go out when it came, and waited to see if her previous instructions had been faithfully fulfilled before telephoning further advice to Leavenworth as she had promised. This done, she started for Mrs. Harry Reynolds's flat, which she had looked up in the telephone book.

The janitor was reading in the lift when Miss Dolarro arrived at 91a Jermyn Street, and Nina, seeing admiration in his eyes, as in the eyes of most men, sweetly asked if he had lately taken up a child to Mrs. Reynolds's flat.

"No, miss," Sutton replied in the blunt, honest way which often irritated his wife with its tactlessness. "I had a little attack of nose-bleed after me dinner, and had to stop below. Lucky 'tis a quiet time of day with me, till five or six o'clock. I've only just come on duty again. But my wife'll know. She's up in Mrs. Reynolds's flat now."

"Oh, is Mrs. Reynolds there?" asked Miss Do-

larro, taken aback. "I thought she was away, and that my friend Lady Ffrench——"

"There's some young lady there," Sutton hurried to reassure the beautiful visitor. "We see her fairly often, both when Mrs. Reynolds is home and when Mrs. R. is abroad. At such times she calls now and then for letters, and has a key of her own; so we know it's all right to let her use the place. But we've never happened to learn the young lady's name."

"She's Lady Ffrench, Sir Hugh Ffrench's wife. You must have heard of him, and the romance of how the coal found on his Yorkshire estate has made him a millionaire," Nina was careful to inform the man. She wanted him to remember who "the young lady" was, and it was good news to her that Sandie often called in Mrs. Reynolds's absence. She dared not, on so short an acquaintance, question the janitor as to the callers Lady Ffrench received in this secret haunt, but it occurred to her that the wife might be an easier person to approach. It was very fortunate indeed that the janitor's "little attack" had prevented him from seeing the child join her mother. Nina could have wished nothing better. Now, if only the woman should answer the ring at the door of the flat, and if she should turn out to be the "right sort"!

Mrs. Sutton did answer the door, and the instant that Nina's eyes fell upon the "fox-face," their owner felt confident of success.

"I am little Miss Ffrench's governess," she an-

nounced in a voice too low to reach Sandie's ears, if Sandie were listening within. "I hope she has already arrived, and——"

"Yes, miss, she's arrived," Mrs. Sutton was quick to reply, "but she's gone out again with the lady she says is her mother."

These words, and the tone in which they were spoken, told Nina in a flash that Sandie had not ingratiated herself with the woman.

"Oh, yes—Lady Ffrench," agreed Miss Dolarro. "They are both out? Have they been gone long?"

"About twenty minutes," the other judged. "I heard the lady mention something about tickets for railways and ships, so I'm afraid you may have to wait a bit if you want to see them."

"I'm quite willing to wait," said Nina pleasantly. "But I—I wish I might speak to you in confidence, Mrs.—er——"

"Sutton," she promptly informed, and there was a flash of eager curiosity in the eyes which Sandie thought "fox-like." "You can say anything you wish, miss. Me and my husband are used to being in positions of trust."

"Thank you!" Nina exclaimed. "This is a very delicate affair, though, and once I begin I may find myself causing you a lot of bother. I wouldn't like to risk that happening, unless you'll let me make it up to you. Miss Ffrench's father, Sir Hugh, is a very

important man, and if you help him, through me, his daughter's governess—you will be well paid."

"Thank you, miss; I should be very pleased to help the gentleman and you in any way," Mrs. Sutton assured her. "As for my husband, he's good as gold—'most too good for this world and its wickedness, I think sometimes—so p'r'aps it'd be as well to keep him out of the business as much as possible. Sure as fate, he'd put his foot in it somehow."

"I see," said Nina, smiling. "Men are like that, often! I daresay we two women can get on without him. You're very kind to take an interest, and promise your help. I feel I can trust you! But you will hurt my feelings unless you accept—er—just a trifle to go on with; nothing at all to what you can earn a little later, if you care to."

Mrs. Sutton graciously "accepted" a five-pound note, which she recognised by the crisp crackle of it in her hand, without demeaning herself to look. *At least,* she knew that it must be *at least* a "fiver"!

"I'm at Sir Hugh's service, and yours, I'm sure, miss," she murmured, slipping the money into a pocket of her old-fashioned black skirt.

"There are a number of things to explain before I can make you understand what *must* be done and not done," Nina went on. "We may be interrupted here, by Lady Ffrench coming back sooner than you think. Is there some flat that's unoccupied, where you could take me for a little talk quite by ourselves? You say

Lady Ffrench has a key of her own, so she won't need you to let her in."

"The other flat on this floor is empty to-day," said the janitor's wife. "Major Evans is in the country with his valet for the week-end."

As she spoke, she selected her pass-key from others on a ring which dangled from a chain at her waist. A door at the opposite end of the hall yielded to the key's touch, and in a moment more the two women were safely shut away in the twilight behind it. Mrs. Sutton switched on a light in a curtained dining-room and Nina, selecting a chair for herself, invited her guide to sit down also.

"Now I am going to confide in you," Miss Dolarro carefully began, choosing each word for the best. "There's a question of money that's to be left by Sir Hugh Ffrench's unmarried sister to my charge, little Fay. Miss Ffrench dislikes her sister-in-law. She can't bear to believe that Lady Ffrench has an influence on the child. If she thought Fay loved her mother better than her *aunt,* Miss Ffrench would change her will. There has been a—well, a sort of family quarrel, and Lady Ffrench is to blame, I'm afraid. She's young, and not very discreet—as you may have guessed if you've seen her often."

"I can quite believe you, miss, when you say it of her!" hedged Mrs. Sutton.

"Sir Hugh's and Fay's interests will both suffer if it's known that the child came here to-day," Nina

went on. "I saw your husband downstairs. He hadn't seen Fay—didn't know anything about her. If you can prevent him from knowing, it will be good."

"I'll go down now, and send him out on an errand that'll keep him away till after the time when the lady and little girl are like to come back," volunteered the woman, jumping up in haste. "I'll tell him that I'll look after the lift myself—and I will do so—more or less!"

In eight or ten minutes she had returned to her waiting guest. "Sutton's gone," she said, panting a little. "I sent him for—but never mind. You won't care about that. What else do you wish me to do for you and this Sir Hugh Ffrench?"

"There are three more small services I'll want from you to-day," explained Nina. "The first is, to let me remain in this quiet place till after Lady Ffrench and little Fay have come back. The second is, to find some way of bringing the child to me here. The third is, when Lord Derek Leavenworth arrives, as he will arrive shortly, open the door of Mrs. Reynolds's flat and let him go in without first announcing him to Mrs. Ffrench."

"The first and third things are easy enough, miss," said Mrs. Sutton, "except that I don't know the gentleman by sight. But I suppose he'll give me his name?"

Nina had been working up to this. "Has Lord Derek Leavenworth never called on Lady Ffrench before, when she's been alone in Mrs. Reynolds's flat?"

The woman shook her head decisively.

"No, miss, there has never been a gentleman to call on this lady alone. I'm sure of that, for I was always a bit on the watch and it's seldom she's been in the house more than five minutes at a time in Mrs. Reynolds's absence, till to-day. She just flitted in for letters to post to some address the tenant didn't want us to know—and *out* again."

Nina was disappointed to hear this. But with such a person as Mrs. Sutton to deal with the blow was not severe. "Suppose," she ventured, "just suppose—you should be asked this same question later, you needn't be quite so positive, need you, that Lady Ffrench didn't receive callers, Lord Derek Leavenworth among others!"

"There's ways of making me positive in the other direction," the janitor's wife hinted.

"Would—er—twenty pounds convince you?"

"Fifty would, I'm sure, miss. And cheap at that, because once I'd made a certain statement I'd have to stick to it for my own sake."

"Naturally. Fifty it shall be. And twenty pounds to-day extra—over and above the five I've given you, if everything comes off according to plan. Lord Derek will mention his name when he comes; and you'll remember and be able to describe him afterwards."

"What if he gets here before her ladyship?"

"Let him in just the same—to wait," Nina said.

CHAPTER XVII

LORD DEREK LEAVENWORTH did arrive before Lady French and Fay came back.

Mrs. Sutton ushered him in, remarking that her ladyship might return at any moment. Then guaranteeing to "keep the coast clear" whatever happened, she advised Nina that a short chat with the gentleman in Mrs. Reynolds's flat would be safe.

Leavenworth had obeyed Miss Dolarro's telephoned instructions to reach 91a, Jermyn Street at a certain hour; but in giving them she had not counted on Sandie's absence. She had merely allowed herself reasonable time to get the child out of the way, so that Sandie should be alone and unchaperoned. In a few hurried words she explained to him the change of programme, and that she still intended to eliminate Fay.

"I hope to get hold of her before she goes into the flat at all," Nina told Lord Derek. "I think that can be managed, too, for when Lady Ffrench appears on the scene, the janitor's wife will meet her. She'll say there's a gentleman inside who insisted on being let in—a tall dark gentleman who stated that he was her husband. Lady Ffrench is no coward, whatever else she is, and she'll be quite ready to face Sir Hugh.

She'll think that Hortense has given her away to him. But she'll be scared of losing Fay. If she doesn't propose leaving the kid with this Mrs. Sutton—who's with us heart and soul now, for what she can get!—the woman will invite Fay downstairs, to see the cat, or to come with her for some reason or another. I'll do the rest! Except that you must give me twenty pounds, or something twenty can be realised on. I've promised that to Mrs. Sutton—and I've already parted with my only fiver, as a 'sweetener' to start off with."

Derek "hadn't twenty shillings" but, assured that the need was pressing, sacrificed a gold cigarette case that bore his monogram in diamonds. With this in her muff, Nina fled to the security of the other flat, fearing to be "caught" by Sandie, and the whole scheme spoiled.

Mrs. Sutton was on hand to work the lift when Sandie came back to 91a, Jermyn Street, with Fay. She took the two up to Mrs. Reynolds's flat, and then announced with a slightly confidential air that there was a gentleman waiting in the flat—"a tall, dark gentleman, as says he is your ladyship's husband."

Sandie's heart missed a beat. As Nina Dolarro had prophesied, her first thought was of Hortense. She had an impulse towards flight, but since girlhood it had been a boast of hers that she "never ran away from anything or any one." If it were not for Fay——

"Can you keep my little girl for me while I speak

with—with this gentleman?" she asked the janitor's wife.

"Yes, your ladyship, with pleasure," was the cheerful reply. "Come, little missy, I will show you something nice that you will like. It's in a pretty flat on this same floor. The tenant's away, and you shall play about as much as you wish."

Sandie was too preoccupied with the ordeal before her to notice Fay's look of appeal. The child shared her mother's sense of repulsion for the "fox-face." Besides, if her father had come, she wanted, oh, dreadfully wanted, to see him. It was sad to be sent away like this, and it made her homesick for Hugh to find that Sandie seemed to have forgotten her existence. Fay hung back to watch Sandie open the door of Mrs. Reynolds's flat, without turning for a glance; and the child did not move until the door had almost slammed in her face. Then she yielded to the large hand that enveloped her little gloved fingers, and let herself be led into the dark entrance hall of a flat opposite.

"There's a light in the dining-room, missy, and you will be surprised at what you'll find there!" purred Mrs. Sutton.

Fay vaguely imagined that she was to be entertained by a dog or a cat or a bird belonging to the absent tenant, and she was entirely indifferent to the thought of such beguilement. She wanted her father or mother, or, better still, both!

"I don't feel as if I could be surprised," the child thought indifferently; but she changed her mind at sight of Miss Dolarro. She was more than surprised. She was dumbfounded.

Nina gave her charge no time, however, to cry out or try to escape, if the tiresome little thing should feel inclined to do either. Before the dining-room door shut out Mrs. Sutton's retreating form, the Italian girl was on her knees with both arms clasped round the slightly resisting white figure.

"Darling Fay!" she cooed. "Your father has sent me for you. He is so unhappy, because he thinks you don't love him any more, or you wouldn't have run away from him."

Fay was no longer on the defensive. Tears dimmed her eyes and she clung to Nina. "Oh, I do love him!" she faltered. "I didn't want to come away, but I had to, because I love Sandie too, and she needed me. Sir Hugh—I mean father—is with her now, though, so if I go to him I'll be with her too."

"No, dear, he is not there," Nina broke the news gently. "If some one is with your mother, it isn't Sir Hugh. He is out looking for you, not sure where you may be, but I thought of this place, because Hortense told me where Lady Ffrench was. I don't want to take you away from her, of course, if she needs you as you say she does. But she doesn't need you for a little while, does she? Didn't she ask Mrs. Sutton to

keep you till she finished talking with the gentleman who was waiting in the flat?"

"Yes, she did," Fay admitted. "But——"

"Well, darling, come with me, if only for a few minutes," pleaded Nina. "If your father's got home from his search, you can explain to him yourself, and perhaps he won't mind quite so much. If he's still out, I know where to telephone, and he'll rush back to you. We can leave a message for Lady Ffrench with Mrs. Sutton saying you'll be with her very, very soon. I'm sure she won't object. And most likely you'll be here again even before she wants you."

Fay could not resist these arguments. They seemed so reasonable and good. Besides, she did long to see her father! It would be dreadful to refuse. As for the "tall, dark gentleman" who said that he was "her ladyship's husband," Fay was too young and too preoccupied with Nina's proposal to wonder much about him.

He was just some one who knew Sandie; and the rest was a mistake of that woman with a face like the face of Reynard the fox, in the fable book.

"Please let's hurry, then!" she said; and Nina asked nothing better than to obey.

Mrs. Sutton had been thoughtful enough to call a taxi in advance; but she delayed Miss Dolarro on the threshold for an instant, to inquire about the twenty pounds. "Sorry to keep you, miss," she apologised,

"but you promised, and I thought you might have forgot."

Nina produced the cigarette case with its flashing diamonds. "This is worth three times twenty pounds," she said. "It belongs to Lord Derek Leavenworth. You see his monogram? You shall have the money in exchange for the thing to-morrow. But it may be that Lord Derek won't take back his property. It may suit him to have you find it in Mrs. Reynolds's flat."

The woman knew enough about jewellery to be sure that she was running no risk in accepting the pledge. She did not attempt further argument, therefore, but stood watching her with a peculiar three-cornered smile, as the beautiful girl drove away with the beautiful child. She had had some rather queer experiences in her career, but this was one of the oddest that had ever occurred at 91a, Jermyn Street.

Nina's latchkey admitted them into the house without being seen by any one. So far, she hoped and believed, nobody save herself was aware that Fay had been out. She rushed the child up to the nursery; telling her that Sir Hugh would prefer to find her there. He would come in a moment if he had got home. If not, Nina promised that he wouldn't be long.

She would have liked to lock the door upon the child, but dared not do that, lest Fay should suspect a trick. And, tiresome as the little creature had been, you could, Nina believed, trust her word. That word

was given that the child would stop quietly where she was till her governess should return.

Instead of going to look for Sir Hugh, Nina went straight to her own room. She had there a tiny apparatus for making tea; a miniature spirit lamp, and a kettle not much bigger than her hand. There was a cup, too, and having boiled a little water, Nina placed in this cup a small silver ball containing a measure of tea. When the water had taken on a pale golden hue, the girl removed the tea-ball, and dropped into the liquid a five-grain tabloid of veronal.

"The kid won't drink it all," she told herself. "If she gets down half, I'll be lucky, so the stuff can't hurt her. And there must be enough to have a quick, strong effect, or it will be of no use."

"Here, dear baby, drink this," she said soothingly. "Your father hadn't come in, but I got him on the telephone. He'll be here in a few minutes, and for his sake I want you to have a little colour in your face when he sees you. You look like a tiny ghost now. But this medicine will bring the blood to your cheeks. It isn't too bad—only rather bitter, perhaps. I've put in some sugar. Be brave, and please Sir Hugh."

That was enough for Fay. She took the cup into her own hands, and had drunk more of the doctored tea than she was meant to drink, before Nina could stop her.

The Italian girl was startled when she saw that the child had swallowed nearly all the potion. Five grains

of veronal was a stiff dose for a baby like that, though Nina herself took ten grains at night, once or twice a week. How awful if the creature died! The very thought turned Miss Dolarro's blood cold. But she consoled herself. If she saw Fay sleeping too soundly, she would wake her, and shake her, and force doses of strong coffee down her throat. Oh, it was going to be all right, and turn out as she had so carefully planned for it to turn out. Besides there was some tea left in the cup. Consequently there must be a grain or two of the drug left also.

"One reason you look so washed out is because you had no nap," Nina argued, in her most soothing voice. "If you can drop off for a few minutes till your father comes home, you'll be another child. You shall sit in my lap, dear, and I'll hold you in my arms. Won't that be nice?"

Fay was too kind of heart and too polite to hurt Miss Dolarro's feelings by saying that it would not be nice. But it was with reluctance that she let herself be lifted on to Nina's lap. She didn't want to go to sleep. Somehow the thought of sleep made her afraid.

One of the beautiful hands that Fay did not love, gently pressed the golden head down upon a supporting shoulder. Then Nina began softly to sing an Italian lullaby—the song of a mother to her "bambina"—"Bella Bambina Mia."

The words, repeated again and again, seemed to

hypnotise Fay. She had been very wide awake, keyed to a high nervous tension; the rocking to and fro in Nina's arms was like the rocking of a cradle. The child had an odd sensation that a grey curtain was slowly descending upon her, folding her in. And the curtain was sleep.

The minutes passed. Nina sang on. She dared not fix her eyes on the child's dropped lids, for to do that was supposed to waken a sleeper. Often, however, she cast a swift glance at the face hugged to her breast. Now and then the long lashes fluttered, but at last they were still. The lips parted slightly. Nina fancied that the colour was leaving them. Yes, certainly they had become pale! The faint rose-tint had drained from the oval of the cheeks.

"Fay!" the girl whispered.

There was no answer. The child did not stir. Nina felt a faint shiver of fear. She touched a small, utterly relaxed hand. It was cold! But there was nothing to fuss about! This was precisely the kind of sleep that was needed to suit her plan—the plan for which (she had hinted to Leavenworth) she "risked prison."

The risk, however, was only if Fay died, or were ill enough to rouse a doctor's suspicions. She wouldn't die. And if she were ill, Nina would nurse her so devotedly as to gain the reputation of an angel!

Despite these self-consolations, however, Miss Dolarro was thankful to see Fay move, without rousing,

and turn over when she had been laid on the bed in her own room. Once there, with patience and caution the governess undressed her charge, slipping on to the unresisting form the blue dressing-gown and slippers Fay had discarded when she went out.

In the frock which the child had put on for her adventure, there was a loose, white silk lining attached only at the shoulders and waist. The letter which had summoned Fay to Sandie was pinned on to this lining between the silk and the soft woollen material of the gown. Its existence had been forgotten by Fay and her mother, though Sandie had suggested that it should be brought to her. And now, in her anxiety to remove all traces of the child's outing, Nina was less observant than usual. She did not feel or see the envelope pinned with a safety pin inside the frock's lining. She hung up the dress behind all the others in the wardrobe; and then, with everything as it had been before Fay's "sly trick" of escape, the governess had only one more small task to accomplish. This was to wash out the cup which had contained the tea and veronal. If, later, the child's sleep deepened to danger zone, Nina would hide her own supply of the drug. It might be a good idea to find a place for it in Lady Ffrench's room, if she could enter there presently without fear of being seen. But meanwhile, she stole back and turned on the light over Fay's bed. There were blue shadows under the motionless lashes. Nina laid her hand on the child's heart. It seemed

scarcely to beat. In the tiny, cold wrist there was no perceptible pulse.

Her own body chilled.

"Fay! Fay!" she cried. The time had come to act.

Seizing the slight shoulders, Nina shook them with violence.

"Wake up! Wake up!" she cried, and gasped out a sigh of intense relief as Fay's eyes opened blindly. Almost at once they closed again; but the signs were good! If the child could open her eyes, she wasn't likely to die. The essential thing was not to let her sink again into complete unconsciousness.

Nina had not been sure, when Fay first dropped asleep, whether the veronal had begun to act, or whether the lullaby had lulled the tired brain into repose. Now, however, there was no doubt that the drug had taken effect.

Again and again the watcher shook the child till she started awake, though too dazed to be more than vaguely aware of her surroundings.

For an hour Miss Dolarro did not relax her efforts, which became mechanical at last, so that she could usefully employ her mind elsewhere. While Fay roused and dozed, dozed and roused again, Nina's thoughts ran into the future. Sir Hugh, she told herself, mustn't hear of the child's illness until to-morrow morning. Already she had said enough to prepare him more or less for a feverish attack. The events of this afternoon were still too fresh in Fay's recollec-

tion to make a meeting between father and daughter safe. As for Lady Ffrench, it would have been like her, Nina Dolarro reflected, to send Sir Hugh a defiant letter. In that connection she—Nina—had better do nothing except "wait and see." Or so she decided in the beginning. Later, what seemed an inspiration jumped into her head.

About seven o'clock, Nina's violent "first aid" policy had torn Fay out of her veronal stupor. But the child was not yet normally conscious. She saw her governess without being able to identify the dim face bending over her. There seemed at times to be two or three faces. There was an explosive roaring in her ears. Her head ached as if an iron band pressed tightly on her temples. She felt very sick—oh, more sick and miserable than she had ever felt before.

Not only was the suffering physical, it was mental and spiritual as well. Fay had an agonising impression—now near as the beating of her own heart, now far away—that she ought not to be where she was. She was needed somewhere else, but where, and by whom she could not think. She could not think at all!

When Nina dared venture to let the child rest for a few minutes, she hurriedly made some strong tea, and forced Fay to take a few swallows. "You must drink it," she insisted. "Just a little, and then you may sleep if you want to."

"It's all right now to let her drop off," the governess thought. "If she doesn't go white again, and blue under the eyes, she can lie still the whole night for all I care. Then what I have to do will depend upon how much she remembers to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XVIII

ALL day Hugh found himself thinking a great deal about Sandie. Not with affection or relenting. Rather the contrary. But he could not put her face out of his mind.

Just because he wished to do so, and because Sandie didn't deserve to be thought of, he tried constantly to call up a more welcome picture; the picture of Nina Dolarro and Fay as he had seen them at luncheon.

Irish and Italian blood evidently made an exquisite blend. The girl was a wonderful mixture of intellect and charm. No wonder Mary was fond of her protégée! She was delightful with Fay. She ought to marry and have a child of her own. But he hoped that she wouldn't leave *his* child yet awhile. So sweet, so wise a young woman was a great acquisition, and if only Sandie wouldn't be an idiot—yes, a vindictive idiot!—"home" might have an attraction for him in future that it hadn't offered since he and Sandie began to drift apart.

Then came the image of Sandie again! It annoyed him; and though he had not taken her threats seriously, there was a premonition of trouble in his mind. Whether it was connected entirely with Sandie or

partly with Fay he wasn't sure. But Miss Dolarro, when she came to his study, had seemed slightly anxious about the child. He decided to dine at home, and satisfy himself that the little thing was all right.

Unless Sandie were disengaged, he couldn't invite Miss Dolarro to bear him company in the dining-room. He would have to eat alone; but there was nothing to prevent his paying a visit to the nursery.

From his club he called up the house and asked to have the cook informed that he would return for dinner. He then added the question, "Is her ladyship dining at home?"

The answer was in the negative. Her ladyship had been out, apparently, since before luncheon, and had left no word about returning, although it was the day of the month upon which she "received" in the afternoon. A number of people had called, expecting to see her ladyship, and had been much disappointed at her absence.

"Just like her to forget her friends—as she forgets her husband!" Hugh thought bitterly. And it did then enter his mind that Sandie might have carried out her threat. But the idea was too strenuous to associate with a Butterfly.

He tapped at the nursery door, on his way to his room to dress for dinner. Nina answered his knock, a book in her hand, and a look of glad surprise in her eyes—though as a matter of fact she had been prepared for the visit.

"Where's Fay?" Hugh asked, when he had bidden the governess "good-evening."

"She's in bed," Nina informed him, her voice lowered as if to prevent its being heard in the child's bedroom adjoining.

"In bed?" echoed Ffrench. "Haven't you packed her off unusually early even for a small girl of her age?"

"Now don't be worried if I explain!" Nina smiled up at him. "For really, there's nothing to be worried about. I'd be the first one to tell you if there were. But the dear baby has been in bed all the afternoon. She couldn't sleep at first, when I tucked her in for her nap after luncheon. You remember what I said to you in the study? When I went up to look at her I found the poor wee one tossing about with a headache, and what we'd call a "fit of nerves" in a grown-up person. I knew something must have happened to upset the child—something she'd kept from me—and I got it out at last. When she'd told me her troubles, and I'd soothed her the best I could, she dropped asleep from sheer exhaustion. You see, the poor lamb had been crying dreadfully, all alone, while I was with you. If I'd dreamed that there was anything wrong, I wouldn't have left her for the world."

"But you don't tell me what upset her," said Hugh. "She seemed all right at lunch."

"Not quite, when I thought it over afterwards. She

was in a nervous state. You know, I thought you might have been right, and that we'd walked her too far this morning. But, Sir Hugh, I hardly feel I can repeat to you the—the story she told me."

Hugh's presentiment seemed to gather around him, enfolding him like a heavy fog. "I beg that you will repeat it," he said.

"I—but perhaps you know—perhaps you can guess," Nina faltered, looking very shy and unhappy, indeed, though she was in the act of profiting by her "inspiration."

"I have no idea what you refer to," Hugh answered almost sharply, for she was alarming him about the child. "Please don't keep me in suspense, Miss Dolarro."

The girl hesitated. "Lady Ffrench didn't say anything to you—didn't write?" she ventured.

"No," said Hugh. He felt the blood ebb from his heart, but his face did not change.

"When Fay and I were going down to lunch," Nina went on, "Lady Ffrench stopped her on the stairs, you remember—to give her that pretty ring Fay showed us. Well, it seems there was more than that—but—but Fay was warned that it must be a secret. She meant to keep it, I know, but she'd lost self-control. Lady Ffrench really stopped her to say good-bye. She told Fay that she was going away, and would never come back. She said they might not see each other again in this world—or anyhow for years. No wonder the

poor darling didn't seem quite herself at lunch. I hardly know how she managed to bottle up her grief so long! Oh, Sir Hugh, I did so hope there might be some misunderstanding, but you hadn't been gone many minutes, I think, when—when a thing happened which showed there was no mistake."

"What happened?" Ffrench's voice sounded cold, utterly callous, but a quick glance that Nina couldn't resist, betrayed to her his real feeling by the drawn lines round the mouth, and the smouldering fire of the eyes. She admired him intensely.

"Fay begged me to run to her mother's room, and see if she had gone," the girl took up the story again. "I couldn't quiet the child in any other way, so I did go—though I felt it a liberty. I knocked at the door of Lady Ffrench's bedroom. Hortense was there. At first she wouldn't say anything. Then she told me that her mistress was nursing a sick friend—Mrs. Harry Reynolds—at her flat."

"That woman!" Hugh muttered between his teeth.

"Oh, but Mrs. Reynolds isn't in town. I saw in an illustrated paper the other day that she was out of England. So I felt worried. I took another liberty. I ran down to Lady Ffrench's boudoir and looked up Mrs. Reynolds's flat in the telephone book. The flat's in Jermyn Street—91a. I called Lady Ffrench, to say that darling Fay was ill with grief. I thought if she knew that, maybe she'd change her mind and come back. But——"

"Well?" Hugh prompted, in a forlorn pause. "Did you get an answer?"

"Ye-es. Only it—wasn't from Lady Ffrench."

"A servant?"

"No. How can I tell you, Sir Hugh? And yet you ought to know. Lord Derek Leavenworth answered me. I recognised his voice from hearing it the other evening here. Shall I go on, or—or would you rather——"

"You needn't go on, Miss Dolarro. I've heard enough for the present," Ffrench cut her short.

CHAPTER XIX

"DEREK LEAVENWORTH!" Sandie exclaimed, stopping short in surprise, as she entered the drawing-room of Mrs. Reynolds's flat, having left Fay with the janitor's wife. "I thought Hugh had found out—and come for me. Did you—but of course you didn't!—it must have been a mistake the woman made!—say you were my husband?"

"Darling, I may have said it. All's fair in love and war, you know, and I had to be sure of seeing you alone," Leavenworth pleaded, seizing her hands, since she would not let him take her in his arms. "It's only anticipating a little, anyhow, isn't it? Before long I shall be your husband, I hope. I adore you! You do love me a little, too, don't you, my sweet?"

Sandie did not answer his question. She seemed not to have heard it. "How did you know I was here?" she asked, a slight sharpness in her voice.

"I telephoned, and your maid—at least, I suppose it was your maid—answered me. She said you'd left home for good. I could have sung for joy. It was my dream come true—sooner than I'd dared to hope, though I did hope; for more than once you know, my precious, you almost promised. You wished me to come, didn't you? Surely you did?"

"No, I didn't," Sandie told him frankly. "If I ever meant for a minute to run away with you, Derry, I changed my mind; you see, I wanted Fay with me. Suddenly, I felt I'd just got to have her! And if my little girl was with me, I—couldn't be with you, too, you see?"

"Dear child, whether you ran away with me, or alone, it's all the same as far as Fay is concerned," Derek explained. "Ffrench wouldn't let you keep her."

Sandie flung up her head. "How could he get her if I went to America? And I am going. I've bought the tickets. At least, they're coming."

Derek smiled. "Did you give Ffrench any hint that you meant to leave him?"

"Yes, I did," Sandie boasted, rather than confessed. "I told him I wouldn't stay if he kept that girl in the house. She's a cat—a schemer! And I shouldn't wonder if old Mary's scheming with her. I feel it in my bones she is! I flew out at Hugh in a rage because he was giving the Dolarro a whole suite of rooms I wanted to put up a cousin of mine in. I called the woman his 'mistress,' and he was wild. He wanted me to take back the word—there and then. I wouldn't have done it if he'd tortured me—except for one thing. It was then I thought of carrying Fay away with me. And I was afraid to let him suspect. So I compromised."

"Still, most probably he did suspect—all the more

from your 'compromising,' because that was unlike you and unnatural," said Leavenworth. "I'd be willing to bet that he's got detectives watching you already, and that they know where you are."

Sandie, who had sunk rather wearily on to the cushions of a big sofa, sprang up.

"Then I'll go!" she exclaimed. "Parcels and things—lots of things!—are coming here, but they can be sent on somewhere else. I——"

She drew in her breath with a little start of alarm. There was a ring at the door. The detectives, perhaps!

"Let me answer that ring," Leavenworth offered. And Sandie, too ignorant of the world's ways to see the folly (from her point of view) of his suggestion, hovered anxiously while Derek shut her softly into the room and went to the entrance door of the flat.

Three or four minutes passed before he came back to her; and when he did come, she did not notice the unwonted bulge in one of his flat, immaculate pockets; such a bulge as might be produced by a large envelope containing ship tickets. As a matter of fact, it did contain ship tickets, and Leavenworth had thought it wise to open the sealed envelope, after tipping and sending away the messenger from Cook's. Inside was a business-like memorandum of the sum owing, and a reminder that Lady Ffrench's gold bag was at present lying in a safe on the premises.

There had been no time for Sandie to explain her peculiar transaction in regard to the purchase of tickets

in a hurry. But knowing her impatience of rules it wasn't difficult to deduce just what had happened; and Leavenworth determined to go himself to Cook's, pay for the tickets, and redeem the bag. He could always get money in one way or another! As he kept all Sandie's notes and letters to him, there was sure to be something written on her stationery with Hugh Ffrench's crest and the address, which he could flourish under clerkly eyes for an instant, as well as producing the tickets and Cook's own communication to Lady Ffrench.

* * * * *

Leavenworth had mentally invented a friend of Mrs. Harry Reynolds, a caller, to account for the ring at the bell (as it was not safe to give Sandie the tickets) but he was saved the trouble of making up a story. While the messenger was still waiting for a pencilled receipt, the janitor's wife appeared.

She had come with the news that little Miss Ffrench had been taken away.

"I'll break it to Lady Ffrench," Leavenworth volunteered. "But I shall have to send for you presently, no doubt, to tell her the tale in your own words. Will you bear me out in saying that the child was more than pleased to go—delighted?"

"Certainly I will, sir," the woman promised.

"Don't forget that my name is Leavenworth," went on the man whose good looks she was furtively admiring. "I'm called Lord Derek Leavenworth, you

know. It will be just as well for you to remember this carefully. You'll be well paid, and——"

"So the young lady promised," cut in Mrs. Sutton. "And she said, your lordship, that when you handed me cash in place of—of the pledge, you might like to leave your gold cigarette case with your monogram, lying accidental-like on Mrs. Reynolds's drawing-room table—or in some other room—when you and her ladyship have vacated the flat."

"A very good idea of the young lady's," returned Leavenworth, "if we can count on you to make it appear accidental."

"Oh, you can count on me for everything you wish for," the woman assured him. "I know a good employer when I see one, your lordship, and 'discretion' is my motto. As for my husband, he ain't on in this scene at all, as the stage folk say."

After a few more hurried instructions, she slid away chuckling over her own wit, and the good luck she expected, which would not have to be shared by that silly man of hers who always blurted out the truth, no matter what it might cost. Fortunately, when this drama turned into a "case," as it surely would, he would never know that things had happened differently from her story of them. She could always fool him! He thought her the greatest little woman in the world.

"Sweetest, I'm afraid I have bad news for you," Leavenworth announced when he went back to Sandie.

"Was it a detective?" she asked, a little frightened, as it had never struck the Butterfly that a detective—a policeman!—could possibly be hired to track her.

"No," Derek answered. "It wasn't a detective. But evidently I was right. You must have been followed here by some one Ffrench may have employed lately to 'shadow' you everywhere. Or else your maid may have given you away. Anyhow, you must buck up, dear. The janitress came to the door to say the child has been taken. Now, don't scream or jump out of the window, darling! It won't do any good. What I just told you would happen, has happened—only a bit sooner than even I expected."

"I won't bear it!" choked Sandie. "I'll have her back again."

"My Butterfly, don't break your wings against a solid wall," said Leavenworth, in gentle, yet convincing tones. "The only way to get the child back is to go back yourself, and take up life again as Hugh Ffrench's wife."

"I won't do that!" she cried, her resolution strengthened by the words she spoke.

"I doubt if he would take you back, even if you went," Leavenworth warned her gravely. "You might have to submit to some shameful humiliation—and nothing gained by it."

"I won't submit to anything," blazed Sandie. "Did Hugh come here himself and steal my child from me?"

"No," Derek said. "The janitress told me a woman came."

"The Dolarro!"

"The description I heard didn't sound like her. But women of the janitor class aren't great on description, of course, so——"

"I want to speak to her. She shall tell me herself what happened," Sandie panted. "Ring that bell over there—it will bring the janitor—or his wife."

Leavenworth rang, and after a few moments' delay, Mrs. Sutton appeared. With a 'lordship' to protect her, and all his instructions clear in her mind, she thought it wise to seem upset.

"Oh, madam—your ladyship!" she faltered, the tip of her nose red. "I hope you won't blame me. I—the little Miss was so keen to go, I couldn't have stopped her if I would."

The words struck at Sandie's heart. Fay had been so sweet, so affectionate, apparently so pleased to be with her, and they had had such a delicious shopping expedition together! Sandie had believed that she had won the little thing completely, and she had looked forward with joy, which would have seemed incredible a few days ago, for a future spent with Fay, quite a good future, too, she vaguely planned it to be. No flirtations—or, anyhow, no very serious ones. And perhaps at the back of her mind had been a dim, yet sweet picture of reunion with Hugh—a repentant Hugh. Now she hated him. Even if he hadn't come

to Jermyn Street himself, he had robbed her of Fay. Let the consequences lie upon his head, not *hers!*

"What sort of person came to take Miss Ffrench away?" Sandie asked, her lips trembling and dry.

"A lady, plainly dressed; I think she was a relative," Mrs. Sutton ventured. "She seemed to know quite well where the child was. She had—what I might call a sort of commanding manner."

"Mary Ffrench!" exclaimed Sandie. "Hugh sent her, I'll never forgive either of them. And Fay—oh, I suppose she's a hypocrite, like most of us. I thought she loved me a little. But she calmly goes back to her father and that Dolarro person without even saying good-bye to me! Cupboard love—cupboard love!"

Breaking into tears, she did not see Mrs. Sutton sidle away and softly shut the door. But Leavenworth saw.

When he and Sandie were alone together once more, he took the Butterfly in his arms, and as for a moment she cried like a child on his shoulder, he kissed the top of the bowed golden head.

CHAPTER XX

IT was in that dark hour before the dawn, when human vitality runs low, that Fay woke with a start, sitting up in bed and refusing to be pressed down again by her governess's strong, yet gentle hands.

Nina had been watching beside her all night, by the light of a blue-shaded lamp.

This time there was normal consciousness in the child's eyes, big and dilated as they were.

"Oh, where's Sandie?" she exclaimed. "Why isn't she with me instead of you? I don't see how you came here, Nina."

Now, at last, had arrived Miss Dolarro's great moment—the moment for carrying out that part of the plan which depended upon her finesse alone for success.

"My pet, I'm with you because you haven't been very well," Nina softly explained. "I've been sitting with you in your bedroom all night. It's nearly morning now."

"In my bedroom?" echoed Fay. "Do you mean in that place where Sandie took me to-day—or yesterday —or whenever it was?"

"Dear child, you're dreaming again—dreaming out aloud. The same dream you seem to have been going through over and over again," the girl said. "Your mother didn't take you anywhere, darling; you mustn't worry about that any more. You're safe in your own little room, in your father's house, and your Nina is with you."

Fay's face flushed and paled. She was puzzled. She felt strangely lost.

"I'm not worrying—exactly," she objected. "But Sandie did take me. At least, I went to her. She was in part of a house. She called it a flat. It belonged to someone else. Why, Nina, you must know! You came there yourself—I mean you came to another flat in the same house. A woman with a face like Reynard the Fox in my fable book took me to you, when Sandie wanted me to be away for a few minutes. You *made* me come home. I remember it all now—everything! You promised you'd take me back to Sandie in a few minutes, as soon as I'd seen father. He was searching for me, you said."

Nina slowly shook her head. "Dreams, my lamb, all dreams!" she repeated. "You haven't been out of the house. The last time you saw your mother was just before lunch. She stopped you on the way down. When you came into the dining-room you showed Sir Hugh and me a lovely ring she'd given you. After lunch I brought you in here to take your nap. I undressed you and put you to bed. I thought you felt sad

about something—in spite of your pretty present of a ring. And sure enough when I came up after a little talk with your father in his study, I heard you crying, I came in——"

"No, I got up and went out!" Fay broke in, beginning to tremble all over. "I dressed myself, I had to get on a chair to unfasten the front door. Why, somebody must have found the chair where I put it!"

"Dearest baby, don't excite yourself!" Nina begged. "That must be part of the dream. Oh, you've been delirious, and worried me almost to death! I assure you on my honour I came in and found you crying. You said that your mother had told you she was going away and never coming back. You grew quite hysterical—if you know what that means. I would have liked to call a doctor—but I hoped you'd come right without, for poor Sir Hugh has so much to upset him just now, I wanted to spare him all I could. You want to spare him, too, don't you, darling? Won't you let me give you a nice glass of hot milk? I'll heat it in a second—and then try to sleep again—a good, natural sleep, without any of those horrid dreams!"

This time Fay let herself be laid back on the pillow, by those unlovably beautiful white hands. She felt far too weak to resist. Her mind was chaos. The child could not believe that the events of the afternoon, apparently so well remembered, were parts of a dream. Yet why should Nina insist that she hadn't been out of doors, that she had been delirious? Cer-

tainly she felt very ill. Her head ached as if a hammer were pounding inside it, and she had a sensation of sickness. She could not drink the milk.

"If I only dreamed that I went to Sandie, where is she now?" came the question. "I want to see her. She said she needed me. Oh, I'm sure she said that!"

"Perhaps she said that," Nina agreed. "But—I'm so sorry, dear lamb, she's gone—far away, just as she told you she was going, and made you cry so dreadfully that you got ill. You can see your father, though, if you would like to very much. I haven't told him how ill you've been, for I knew it would spoil his night's rest—and I believed you needed only a long sleep to be almost all right again. I'll call him if you wish, and he's certain to come, because he loves his little girl dearly. His Fay is all that he's got in the world now! But you don't want to distress him, do you?"

"No," said Fay. "Of course I don't. Will it distress him to come?"

"No—no!" Nina assured her. "He'll love to come. But it would distress him a bit if you told him about the wild dreams you've been having. Men can't understand that women and little girls are different from them—that it isn't anything frightful if they cry or even have hysterics and say queer things they forget about when they're well again. He'll think you're going to die, and the first thing he'll do will be to 'phone for a doctor. Then you'll be dosed with

horrid medicine—castor oil, maybe, and lots of disgusting things. You'd hate that, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I'd hate it!" Fay shivered.

"I thought you would, to say nothing of making your poor father miserable—even more miserable than he is already. We want to comfort him, don't we, instead of making him worse?"

"Oh, yes," the child agreed again.

"Then if I call him to come and take you in his arms, you won't say a word about dreaming that you went out of doors—and saw Lady Ffrench, and I brought you back?"

"No-o, I won't say a word—to-night, anyhow. Or ever, unless I find out that I did go after all," Fay compromised.

"You'll never find out that you 'did go after all,' " Nina persisted, half laughing. And she felt comfortably confident that she could make those words come true.

Fay would never find out.

If Lady Ffrench told the story of running away with her little daughter—vowing that she'd not meant to go with Lord Derek Leavenworth—all circumstantial evidence, all proof would be against her. People would believe that she lied, shamelessly, to 'save her face,' and she would be despised by every mother in England for thus lugging the name of her own child into a sordid Divorce Court squabble.

That there would be a divorce seemed certain to

Nina. She wasn't just quietly sitting still, taking for granted that the thing would happen. She had striven actively to bring it about, and intended to go on striving. Through her, Derek Leavenworth was able to play his part, and as he had a great stake in the game, he was likely to act that part with skill.

It did seem, Nina couldn't help thinking, as if Providence had gone out of its way to help her, everything had worked out so wonderfully, and with such amazing quickness. "If only it goes half as well as it's going now," she told herself, "in a year or little more, I shall be Lady Ffrench. Won't old Mary be pleased? I shan't be surprised if she leaves me nearly all her money—anyhow, all she can spare from her silly charities. I've only got to play my cards right for a while—and I can do that."

It was already dreamlike to her that she had wished —that, yes, she'd fancied it the wish of her life—to be rich enough some day to marry that man down in Surrey. Not that there had ever been a chance of realisation. The best she had hoped for was a continuance of his love, and plenty of stolen meetings when she had secured the "rich, titled husband" he had long ago advised her to "go for." Nina had agreed with him as to the wisdom of that ambition, but it had hurt her horribly that he should have the *sang-froid* to urge it. Now—unexpectedly to herself—a rod had been put into her hands for his punishment. She would do what he'd told her to do: marry a rich,

titled man; but she would love that man and be true to him. She would have nothing to do with another! And as she'd been prudent enough never to write any compromising letters, there was no fear of reprisal, such as blackmail.

. . . . . .

Before going to call Sir Hugh Ffrench, as he had asked her to do in case of any change in Fay for better or worse, Nina studied herself in the mirror over her charge's dressing-table.

Although she had been awake all night, and really suffering, lest the child should annoyingly die of heart failure, she looked only the more beautiful for her vigil.

The shadows under her eyes made them strangely alluring, in her own opinion; and her long dark hair braided into two thick plaits that hung over her shoulders, almost down to her knees, gave her an air of high romance. In her sea-blue dressing-gown, cut in severe yet becoming lines from the square opening of the neck, to its narrow train, she was like a mediæval princess strayed out of an old story-book. If Sir Hugh were still half faithful to Melisande Morgan's fairy type, his allegiance couldn't be proof against this vision, seen in the dim mystery of dawn.

In her dainty, pointed slippers, Nina tiptoed to the door of his room and tapped.

Almost instantly the door opened, and Ffrench stood facing her against a background of light. He was

fully dressed, and had evidently been writing letters.

"She's not worse?" he exclaimed.

"Better," said Nina, with her loveliest smile. "The dear little thing asked for you when she woke up. I told her you would be glad to come."

"Delighted!" Hugh answered. Yet even as he spoke the word, it sounded strange in his own ears.

He was thankful that Fay was better, but his heart was so heavy, it seemed as if never again could he feel "delighted."

* * * * * *

He had gone, not long after hearing Miss Dolarro's faltered story, to Mrs. Harry Reynolds's flat in Jermyn Street—had gone, he assured himself, not for love of Sandie, or because he wanted to bring her back after what had happened, but because it was his duty to rescue her if he could, for Fay's sake if not for her own.

When he reached 91a, Jermyn Street, however, the bird had flown. She had driven away in a motor-car with a gentleman, both the Suttons bore witness. A number of parcels and some new luggage had come for her by special delivery from several shops, and it was after receiving them that Lady Ffrench had departed in the car. The Suttons could not say what was to be the lady's destination. It had not been their place to ask, and they had not overheard any directions given to the chauffeur. That it was a private car, however, they had been certain.

Ffrench's first impulse had been to kill Derek Leavenworth. He saw red, and his mind had the confusion of a battlefield after a great fight. But as he walked the streets, trying to cool his brain, clear thinking came back to him.

"The fellow's not worth killing!" he told himself. "And she isn't worth—well, anyhow, she doesn't want to be saved. The best thing I can do for her and for all concerned now—even for Fay—is to divorce Sandie and let her marry Leavenworth. That's what she wants. That's what she's asking for. And it's too late for anything else."

He said not a word to Nina of what he had done, and of the decision he had taken, but because he didn't look at her with the look she wished for, the Italian girl knew that he was absent-minded. No man with his wits fully about him could resist her!

Miss Dolarro was not discouraged, however. With gentle consideration which must touch his heart, she begged her employer not to excite Fay with questions. Then, having motioned him to a chair by the bed, she kept unobtrusively out of the way. It was not until Hugh had sat beside his daughter for half an hour or so, and soothed her to sleep again, that Nina flitted back with a cup of fresh tea and a plate of thin bread and butter on a tray.

"I'm so hungry," she whispered. "But I won't eat or drink unless you do. I've made this for you, Sir Hugh."

Then, as he glanced up at her gratefully, he did see how beautiful and romantic she was. A sense of comfort and even peace came to him from the girl's presence.

CHAPTER XXI.

SANDIE could not make it seem true. It was more like an ugly, persistent dream that went on and on through a fevered, headachy illness, that Hugh was divorcing her for unfaithfulness—she, Melisande Morgan, the adored one, the Princess who could do no wrong, who *had* done no wrong, except flirt a little here and there like the butterfly that she was, and then get caught in a spider's web through no fault of her own.

Yes, the Divorce Court was like a spider's web, a dusty web with close meshes that wound themselves more and more tightly the more she struggled.

Even when she went home towards evening—those dull, winter evenings! And if you could call the hotel where she was staying "home," she had only to shut her eyes to see it all enacted over and over again.

She could see herself walking beside her solicitor, a smart, perky person, very well-dressed—a Mr. Lee Benson—who had been chosen for her by her friend, Lady Beatrice Briggs, Derek Leavenworth's sister. They had to go into the great grey building of the Law Courts through a side entrance, for the Divorce Courts were in what was called the "new wing" (awfully old, Sandie was sure it must be, really, judg-

ing by the dreary look and the musty smell inside!). Then there were tedious flights of stairs to climb, that nobody would ever feel inclined to run up. After that, a long, stone-floored hall, quite suitable to be a prison hall, Sandie thought; and at last, the stuffy, dreadful room of the never-ending dream.

No wonder the room was stuffy! For one thing it was quite small, not nearly large enough for the crush of people who crowded in for this interesting case. The steep gallery at the far end of the room was always crammed. Sandie wouldn't look round at people from her place in front of all the pew-like, oaken benches filled with black gowns and white wigs—or wigs that ought to be white and weren't.

There she sat, hour after hour, on a straight-backed chair with a hard, red-covered seat, next to one of the same sort occupied by the inevitable Mr. Lee Benson. She stared straight ahead at the judge, who didn't wear picturesque red and ermine, but only a plain black robe with white tabs and things at the neck, which rather worried Lady Ffrench in sleepy moments, because she couldn't quite make out how they fastened. His wig sometimes got a little on one side, too, which was annoying, because it made her long to dash up the oaken steps, squeeze behind the judge's table, and straighten the silly horse-hair survival of ancient custom.

She glanced, too, from side to side at the "press seats," where journalists sat and scribbled on "flimsies"

(that was what Mr. Benson called the thin sheets of paper which the writers handed to small boys in livery with red collars).

She looked at the brown oak panelling of the walls, and the grey stone above, set with tall, narrow windows, through which little daylight seemed to filter, and at the big skylight of square, dim panes in the roof, which let in still less light than did the dull windows. Thus, gazing up, she would be dazzled by the yellow glow of the long-stemmed chandeliers from which depended bright, ball-like electric lamps, many of them, which seemed to be set in ugly round crowns.

Often, when Sandie's head ached under her smart hat, she felt as if these ball-like lights came down and rested on her eyelashes, so that her eyes were completely blinded by them. All these things she saw, without turning to glance at the gallery or the rows of seats behind the counsel, and the solicitors who "watched" the case, or even at the standing group whose rear rank was plastered against the wall, spectators for whom there was no room to sit, or shabby hangers-on of the court, cheap detectives, and "all sorts of vague creatures," as Lady Ffrench described them to herself.

Yet she knew, though her eyes did not see them, that many of her so-called friends and still more of her enemies—men or women she had despised or

snubbed—were present, revelling in the excitement of her ordeal.

As for Sandie herself, she never felt excited after the first few minutes of entering the court-room. The heavy atmosphere—it certainly wasn't *air*—oppressed her, slowed the beating of her heart, dulled her wits and stifled her vitality. There was a very special smell, she thought. Henceforth she would associate it with Divorce Courts, and if she ever found anything like it anywhere else, it would bring back these nightmare days to her mind, as nothing else could.

At first, she put on her most charming frocks and hats to appear in court, a different costume each day, for all her things had been sent from what was once "home," to Lady Beatrice Briggs's house, where she had stayed for some weeks before moving, on the advice of her solicitor, to an hotel. As the case wore on, however, with occasional maddening adjournments, Sandie had ceased to care very much how she looked. Something neat and dark, so that she might be stared at as little as possible, was what she craved.

This change came, not so much from the snapping of cameras as she entered or left the building (she'd been used to that sort of thing all her life) as from the horrid necessity to appear in the high, pulpit-like witness-box. She felt a mere butterfly pinned to an index card, there, or rather, so she felt when the coun-

sel employed by Hugh (now known as the "petitioner") heckled her with brutal questions.

Her own counsel had been easy to answer. She had been told what he would ask, and rehearsed in her replies: he "leading up," so that those replies might be short and simple. It was a very different thing when that old devil, Pulteney Bayne, got hold of her!

At first, for a little while—oh, a *very* little while—she had been inclined to the opinion that this bewigged man, with red rolls of fat round his neck, was kind and stupid. She had flattered herself, by his way of beginning his questions—so gentle, so almost apologetic—that he admired and was sorry for her; that perhaps he secretly disapproved of his client's conduct. As soon, however, as the man had won her confidence, and fear of him was the last thing in her mind, he had changed from the fat ox-type to that of an unchained tiger.

He had interrupted her, "rattled" her by snatching the words out of her mouth, reading into them a wrong meaning, or he had roared her down. By the answers he forced her to give, he showed her even to herself as a flippant fool, or worse. What, then, must he have made her look in the eyes of those friends and enemies crowding this hot hole for the joy of seeing Melisande Ffrench trapped and baited?

Her own counsel had done everything possible to prove that, though she might have made mistakes, they had been the mistakes of impulsive youth and inno-

cence. Oh, yes, he had done that beautifully, although she knew from Lee Benson that at first he had refused to take on her case, it was "such a slim one." It was wonderful how subtly he had suggested, without alleging motives on the part of the petitioner, and one of the best witnesses on that side (Miss Dolarro) for denying the defendant's principal plea: that she had taken her child with her, on leaving her husband's house.

But, oh, how foolish the fat, red man had made that plea look! How utterly without proof to substantiate her own words he and the petitioner's witnesses had left her! How guilty each act of hers from the beginning to the end of their long chain of evidence, was made to appear! How, out of her own mouth—the admissions he compelled her to make—did she stand in that pulpit-like witness-box convicted.

Even Derek Leavenworth did her more harm than good, though, of course, when his turn for the pulpit came, he stood up—looking very handsome—and swore that he was not, never had been, Lady Ffrench's lover.

What he thus swore was true, but it didn't *sound* true when he said it, not even to Sandie's ears. And, then, though she had always supposed Derry to be rather beyond the average in cleverness, in connection with this affair he had done stupid things—terribly, dangerously stupid. No doubt they had been done with the best intentions, like the matter of the tickets

at Cook's offices in Piccadilly—so as to secure them for Lady Ffrench and get back the jewellery she had left as a pledge, without further trouble for her: or without any intentions at all, as when he carelessly laid his monogrammed cigarette-case on the dressing-table in Mrs. Harry Reynolds's bedroom, and forgot it!

Had he not done that, despite Mrs. Sutton's evidence, the other side might not have been able to prove that he had been in Mrs. Reynolds's flat at all—poor Mrs. Reynolds, whose name and reputation were made by Bayne to blacken those of "her intimate friend, Lady Ffrench!"

On top of this, and helped by the firm denials of Sir Hugh Ffrench, Miss Dolarro and the servants that Fay had been out of doors on the fatal afternoon, Lady Ffrench's claim that the child had been with her was shown by Pulteney Bayne to be only a lie, but a peculiarly loathsome lie. A treacherous woman trying to hide her own guilt behind her daughter's innocence!

Sandie's counsel, Sterring Smythe, had demanded that the little girl should be brought into court, there to give evidence for or against her mother; but the child, according to doctors' statements and those of her father and governess, was ill, seriously, if not dangerously ill, and her life would be imperilled by such an "unnatural ordeal."

Sterring Smythe, in questioning his client, had led up to the right answer by asking:

"Did you, on leaving Mrs. Reynolds's flat, go to

Lady Beatrice Briggs's house to stay because she was your best woman friend?"

"I did," it was easy to answer.

"Not at all because she was the sister of Lord Derek Leavenworth?" was equally easy to cope with when the question was put by him. "Not at all," Sandie had earnestly echoed. But through Pulteney Bayne's diabolic skill, his hideous way of twisting things round and round, a lurid light had been thrown upon her conduct from the moment of leaving her husband's house till the moment she was brought into the divorce court.

According to him and the witnesses called for the "petitioner," Lady Ffrench had gone to Mrs. Harry Reynolds's flat for the purpose of meeting Lord Derek Leavenworth, whom—in all probability—she had been in the habit of meeting there in Mrs. Reynolds's frequent absences. An elopement had been planned. Lady Ffrench wished to go to America and had secured adjoining cabins for herself and her lover on a ship which was to sail almost at once.

Lord Derek had, naturally, paid for these cabins, and had himself escorted the lady to his sister's house, there to await the departure of the ship. Only the serving of the divorce papers upon Lady Ffrench had kept her in England. It was not until she had received these papers, and had decided to defend the case, that she had moved from the house of Lady Beatrice Briggs to an hotel, and ceased to see Lord Derek once or twice each day.

Hortense, offended by her mistress's desertion, had become a witness for the other side. Her evidence showed flightiness on Lady Ffrench's part, lack of love for her husband, her child and her home. It betrayed the fact that there had been quarrels between Sir Hugh Ffrench and his American heiress wife, known to her friends as the "Princess," or the "Golden Butterfly."

It showed that Lady Ffrench had been in the habit of getting her maid secretly to post letters to Lord Derek Leavenworth, also to other men.

And as to the afternoon at Mrs. Reynolds's flat, the evidence of the janitor's wife was damning. She gave it well, too, and could not be shaken by Lady Ffrench's counsel. Sandie's denial that she had telephoned for Lord Derek, and her assertion that Fay had been with her until "some one came and stole the child away," sounded like brazen lies after Mrs. Sutton's and Nina Dolarro's quietly told stories, Hortense's frightened admissions, and Bayne's cross-questions that produced confused stammerings and tears.

After a case which afforded much joy to Bayswater and Brixton, as well as Mayfair, and proved a god-send to the illustrated dailies, Sir Hugh Ffrench got his decree *nisi;* and Sandie waked from her dazed condition to realise that the black nightmare she had passed through was no dream, but true.

She had wished, when the papers were served upon her, to bring a counter-accusation against her husband, bracketing Nina Dolarro's name with his. But, after

a few inquiries, Lee Benson advised her strongly against such a course. Whatever might happen in future between Sir Hugh and the little girl's beautiful governess, there was no evidence that they had met before the day when, on his sister's recommendation and accompanied by his child, he had motored Miss Dolarro from Beach Hill Farm to London.

Indeed, it had been easy to prove that Miss Dolarro had but recently returned from abroad before arriving in Surrey to stay with Mrs. Harkness. Benson had warned his client that an attempt such as she wished to make would be sure to fail lamentably, and with a fury of despair in her heart, Sandie was forced to abandon her purpose.

A short time ago, if she had read a novel whose heroine, an innocent woman, had been disgraced before the world in an English court of justice, proved a liar when she told the truth, and made to appear an abandoned creature, betraying husband and child at once, she would have said that it was nonsense. Such a thing couldn't happen! Yet now it *had* happened—to her.

CHAPTER XXII

ON the night after the case finished, with the verdict against her, Sandie received a great many letters and telegrams of sympathy, or "congratulations that she was free at any price"; and her rooms were full of flowers; yet, somehow, these tributes only made matters worse. She was sure that even those who had decided to "stick by her" believed that she was guilty of all the accusations.

A few, perhaps, were fond of her, but most of the so-called loyal ones rallied around her standard, because they believed that she would marry Lord Derek Leavenworth. Because Derek's elder brother was a nervous wreck she was likely, some day, after that "happy ending" of her sensational romance, to become a marchioness and a marchioness, especially one possessing a large fortune of her own, was worth keeping up with.

Oh (Sandie told herself), she had no illusions any more! She hated people, and she hated life. She did not know what to do with her future.

A new maid had taken the place of Hortense, a stiff, middle-aged Englishwoman, with an air of ultra-respectability, in whose genuineness Sandie had little faith.

There was no sympathy between them as there had been between Sandie and Hortense, when no fault-finding or "tantrums" of her mistress had produced sulkiness on the part of the French maid. And Parker's face was unrevealing as a mask when she announced to her resting mistress that Lady Beatrice Briggs refused to accept dismissal.

"Oh, let her come in!" Sandie consented indifferently. "It doesn't matter."

So "Bee" came into the flower-filled room, where her friend lay on a sofa. Parker had been brushing her ladyship's thick, bright hair, in the hope of banishing a headache, but she was dismissed and the door closed.

"Darling, I've brought you a note from Derek," announced Derek's sister. "*Do* read it. I'll take him an answer by word of mouth, to save writing, for he's so impatient for a word from you, poor boy."

"He ruined the case," Sandie said dully.

"My *dear!*" exclaimed Beatrice. "He denied everything—even though he stood to lose you, if you had won instead of your husband."

"I know, he denied everything, but *how!*" Sandie flung back bitterly. "Not a thing he said sounded true."

"Well, for the matter of that, neither did a thing *you* said sound true," retorted the other. "That awful cross-questioning was too much for Derek, just as it was for you, dear. He did his best, in most difficult

circumstances, because, as you know, he's desperately in love, and it needed all his unselfishness, all his chivalry, to think only of *you,* and not of himself."

"Unselfishness? Chivalry!" echoed Sandie. "I don't believe in such virtues any more. Once I thought Hugh was at least a *good* man, even if we didn't understand each other. Yet look how he lied, and put that wicked girl up to lie, about Fay. Look how he prevented the child from bearing witness for me. Oh, it's horrible—horrible!"

"The more horrible it is, the more anxious you ought to be to forget him as quickly as possible," Beatrice urged. "I do hope for your own sake, my pet, that you'll marry Derek before Hugh Ffrench takes the governess for his wife! He's sure to do it practically at once after the decree is made absolute. You see, she's got old Mary Ffrench to stand by her, even if he wanted to change his mind—which I don't suppose he will. The creature *is* fascinating—just the kind to attract men."

The words were like little hammers on Sandie's throbbing temples. She had not intended to marry Derek Leavenworth. If she had had any plan at all, it was to go to America, where few people were horrified by divorce, and where she would find plenty of friends—even if that priggish Cousin Caroline *had* written her an awful letter. But the idea of Hugh marrying Nina Dolarro, making Nina Fay's mother,

while she, the real mother, crept meekly away into exile, was intolerable to Sandie Ffrench.

Wouldn't it be wisest, after all, to do the obvious thing, and marry Derek? No one would think the better of her if she didn't. Many would think the better of her if she did.

"Read his letter, now, won't you, dear?" Bee pleaded.

Sandie read the letter—just a love-letter that might have pleased her once.

* * * * *

It was a fact that Fay was ill.

As Nina had said to herself, it was necessary for the child to be ill, in order to get a doctor's certificate which, whatever happened, would keep her out of court. And the doctor who gave the certificate was somewhat puzzled by the symptoms. There was extraordinary lassitude, often slight nausea and dull headache. The action of the heart was weak; the lips were dry and pale; the beautiful fair hair was lifeless. He prescribed a toning-up medicine, and apparently the child took it regularly, and yet no improvement was visible.

Fay knew nothing, of course, about the divorce proceedings, and in her weakness and languor, grief for Sandie's absence blended with her general *malaise*. Physical and mental misery seemed to the child inseparable, one from the other. She did not forget her impression of having gone out one day to join

Sandie, and of having been brought home by Nina Dolarro before her first illness; but as weeks dragged on the vividness of that impression passed, and she accepted Nina's statement that it was part of a delirious dream. She had kept her promise never to mention this dream to Sir Hugh, or to anybody at all, for the reason that she had been "off her head" at the time, and it would grieve those who loved her best to know what strange fancies still haunted her mind.

Besides, Fay felt so tired that it was an effort to talk for long. What she liked was to lie in her father's arms with her eyes half shut, and hear him tell stories of "when he was a little boy." He never went away to Yorkshire any more, yet he had little time to give her by day. It was evening that she looked forward to, just before the bed hour. He was always with her then, and Nina, too; but somehow she never cared to lie in Nina's arms, although Nina was invariably kind and sweet.

The child generally managed to avoid unwanted caresses without hurting Nina's feelings, and when Sir Hugh remarked that she had "an angel for a governess," Fay agreed with a smile. Nina *must* be an angel, for father and Aunt Mary and even some of the servants said that she was one. Fay wished that she could love Nina more, and felt guilty because she could not.

Miss Dolarro's devotion to the sick child was touching to Hugh, especially at this time, when the light of

his home would have been utterly darkened, save for her. He saw the pallor of the soft olive cheeks, and the shadows under the great, dark eyes. Nina was losing flesh, he thought, through taking the family troubles too much upon her slender shoulders. She must find a nurse for Fay, to relieve her from duty, he said; but this Nina refused to do until she was obliged to appear as a witness in the Divorce Court. Then she consented, and a young woman who had been looking after Mrs. Harkness at Beech Hill Farm during a sharp attack of 'flu,' was engaged for a few weeks.

The name of this girl, who had had a year's experience in a nursing home, was Dorothy Mintern. To Nina Dolarro, except as a nurse she was a nonentity; but Nina Dolarro was very far from being a nonentity to Dorothy Mintern. Had Nina guessed just how far, Dorothy Mintern would not have remained in the house for a day.

The nurse had become interested in Miss Dolarro before meeting, or having the most distant idea that she ever would meet her. This was because of Mr. Paul Andrews, the most beautiful young man Dorothy Mintern had ever seen in her life. Her heart beat when he strolled over to Beech Hill Farm to see her patient, as Mrs. Harkness became convalescent.

Often he asked questions about "Nina," and some of the answers given by Mrs. Harkness "intrigued" Dorothy Mintern. Putting two and two together, one would think that Paul Andrews and "Nina" had been

very intimate in some country other than England. It would even seem as if they had been partners in a profession which had thrown them a great deal into each other's society.

"Do you think Nina's likely to land her big fish?" Andrews asked one day. But that was before there was a question of Dorothy going to the house where "Nina" lived. She was interested then only because she had fallen in love with Paul Andrews, and feared that he cared for Nina.

When Mrs. Harkness was well enough to part from her nurse, and get ready to return to America, Dorothy expressed a desire to find a place in London. She wouldn't, she said, object to taking care of an invalid child. About this time a letter from Nina must have come to Mrs. Harkness, mentioning that Sir Hugh wished to relieve her by getting a nurse for Fay.

"If there must be someone, I want her to be of the kind who will be willing to take orders from *me*," Nina wrote; and it occurred to Mrs. Harkness that Dorothy Mintern would "fill the bill." She was a gentle-mannered girl, extremely reticent, yet so meek as to seem old-fashioned.

"Just at present Miss Dolarro is acting as governess to Sir Hugh Ffrench's little daughter," Mrs. Harkness explained. "But she's really an important young lady, and apt to be more important yet by and by. She'll probably marry her employer, who is a millionaire.

I came over to England to chaperon her. It was made worth while for me to do it."

This was a very different story from the one told to Hugh Ffrench, who had been given to understand that Miss Dolarro had travelled as companion to the rich Mrs. Harkness. Dorothy Mintern, however, knew nothing of that story or those circumstances, so she did not doubt Nina's importance, especially after she heard from Mrs. Harkness that a beautiful picture painted by Mr. Andrews was a portrait of Miss Dolarro.

Dorothy was not a malicious girl as a rule, but it hurt to know that the most romantic man who had come into her life thought nothing of her, everything of Nina Dolarro. The queer part of that was his apparent willingness for the lady of his love to marry Sir Hugh Ffrench, who must, of course, be the "big fish" Nina was trying to land. Yes, that certainly was odd; but it did not relieve the prick of Dorothy Mintern's jealousy. She had read all sorts of novels, preferably the ones you hid when you were not reading them; consequently she knew that some men preferred to have "affairs" with married women rather than with girls.

Nina was charming to the new nurse, as she invariably was to every one with whom she came in contact, and Dorothy would perhaps have fallen in love with her, as most people did, had she not come upon the scene with active dislike in her heart. As it was,

the girl felt from the first an unacknowledged wish to harm the beautiful woman who could attract all men. She began to watch the seemingly perfect creature for some hidden fault.

"She's too good to be true," the nurse thought. "I bet she's as deceitful as they make 'em!"

Then one day she burst unexpectedly into the bathroom of the "nursery suite" when Nina had forgotten to lock the door, and saw—or thought she saw—the latter pour into a big bottle a drop or two from a small one.

What she saw—if she saw anything at all—was merely a reflection in a mirror, for Nina was standing with her back to the door. Dorothy, begging pardon for her intrusion, had presence of mind to seem not to have seen; and Nina, if she had done anything she wished to conceal, had reason to believe she had succeeded. Dorothy went out instantly, but she remembered the look of the large bottle. It contained Fay's tonic, and had just been refilled at a chemist's the night before.

"Good Lord, can she be slowly poisoning the child!" was the horrified question that sprang into Dorothy's mind.

The idea was so sensational as to be well-nigh incredible, unless to one who *wished* to credit it. The nurse didn't tell herself in words that she would be glad if Nina Dolarro turned out to be a poisoner, but deep in her heart she knew that it was so, and she began to examine the probabilities.

Why, to begin with, should Miss Dolarro wish to poison her charge? For one thing she might be jealous of Sir Hugh Ffrench's love for the little girl. She might think that if she married him it would be for her advantage to have a child of the first wife's out of the way. Or there might be another motive for doctoring the medicine.

Dorothy Mintern had heard from one of the housemaids a full account of Fay's first attack of illness. It had come suddenly, on the very day of the mother's elopement. The doctor had been puzzled, and had never since ceased to be puzzled, for the child had never from that time fully recovered her health.

"What if the little thing knows something about what *happened* that last day?" Dorothy wondered. "Something Miss Dolarro doesn't want to have come out in the divorce case, for fear it might help Lady Ffrench?"

There was no detail of the case to be found in the newspapers which Dorothy Mintern did not eagerly read every day. She knew that Lady Ffrench claimed to have had the child with her in Mrs. Reynolds's flat. She knew also that the defendant swore to having bought cabins for herself and Fay, not for herself and Lord Derek Leavenworth. She had intended to engage a nurse, or in any case a new maid for the voyage to America, she asserted. This story was denied by several witnesses on the petitioner's side, most forcibly of all by the child's governess.

Miss Dolarro had sworn that Fay Ffrench had not left the house for a moment on the afternoon in question. She had been tired after a long walk in the morning, and greatly excited by a scene with her mother, the truth about which came out in delirium after a long and feverish sleep.

Servants had confirmed this statement. Both the janitor and his wife at 91a, Jermyn Street had testified that no child had been seen by them that day; Cook's assistant who sold the tickets to Lady Ffrench swore that she had come alone; and Lady Ffrench had been forced in cross-examination to remember, rather feebly, that she had left Fay in a taxi when she went to Cook's.

Several witnesses from shops she had visited that day had failed her also, by forgetting the circumstances which attended those visits, and the fact that Lady Ffrench certainly had purchased child's clothing was not considered proof that the child was in her possession at the time.

What if the story were true, after all, and Lady Ffrench was the victim of ill-luck and a cruel enemy?

It would have been ill-luck that she had chosen two strange shops for her purchases, instead of those where she was known; but an enemy could have bribed the Suttons to swear falsely. Dorothy Mintern thrilled as she foresaw the possibilities for herself if she could prove Miss Dolarro to be a wicked woman planning the ruin of Sir Hugh Ffrench's wife!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE first thing to do was obvious, especially to the intelligence of a nurse. She must have a new bottle of medicine put up from the prescription number on the old one, and she must have the contents of the latter analysed.

Before Nina went out Dorothy received instructions as to giving Fay her tonic, and, with her usual meekness of manner, promised to obey. The moment Nina had gone, however, she put on the veiled toque and long blue cape of her nurse's uniform. There was a telegram which she must send in person, she explained to Fay, who was to be good and not stir till she came back. "Not to stir" was very easy in these days of weakness and depression, and Dorothy was not long away. When she returned it was time for Fay's medicine, which, the child remarked, wasn't quite so sickly tasting as usual.

"Perhaps they haven't put all the things into this new bottle," Fay added.

"Don't say that to Miss Dolarro," Dorothy advised. "Because if you do, she's sure to take it back and inquire. This will perhaps do you just as much good, or even more."

Fay was inclined to agree with her nurse about this,

for the slight sensation of sickness which had always followed upon swallowing the medicine did not come. This was a great relief, for the child hated and dreaded her medicine. She would from the first have refused to take it, if Nina had not so firmly insisted. She was pleased to be left alone with Dorothy Mintern, for a change, but when Dorothy began to ask questions concerning her mother the child looked distressed.

"I love to think about Sandie, but Nina has told me not to talk about her," she said.

"Miss Dolarro didn't tell you not to talk to *me,* did she?" Dorothy inquired.

"She said, 'Don't talk to anyone,' " Fay apologised.

Dorothy laughed.

"*I'm* not anyone! I'm only a nurse. She couldn't have meant me. Has anyone explained to you that your father is going to get a divorce from your mother because of what happened when she ran away? The case will be finished this afternoon, I expect, and when your father comes home this evening from court, where he has to go every day, he and your mother will be parted for ever. They won't be husband and wife any longer. He can marry someone else if he likes, and so can she."

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed Fay. "Won't they be my father and mother any more, either?"

"Yes, they'll be that," Dorothy reassured her. "But most likely you'll never see your mother again. She told a newspaper reporter that she wanted to go to

America when she could get away from England, and never come back where she had been so unhappy."

"That's what she said to me the day I went to her!" cried Fay, carried out of her listless self for a moment. "I mean that's what she said in the *dream!*"

"What dream?" asked Dorothy, suppressing eagerness.

Fay was embarrassed.

"Nina doesn't want me to talk about that, either—'to Sir Hugh or any one,' was what she said."

"But, girlie, I just told you a nurse *isn't* any one."

The child's eyes grew large and wistful.

"Oh, do you think I *might* talk to you about that dream without breaking my promise to Nina?" she wanted to know. "It would be such a relief!"

Dorothy assured her that she could say whatever she liked to a *nurse* without breaking the promise.

"It was the most *real* dream!" breathed Fay. "I thought Sandie—that's my mother—gave me a letter the day she went away and told me to read it when I was alone. It was just before lunch—in the dream. And she *did* talk to me then. Even Nina knows that. But the letter was in the dream, and reading it after Nina had put me on the bed for my afternoon nap, and my dressing to go out, and all that."

"What was 'all that'?" Dorothy prompted.

"The rest of the dream. Getting on to a chair to unlock the front door, and running round the corner

to find a taxi, with the money in my hand that was in Sandie's letter."

"Oh, in the dream you got into a taxi to go to your mother?" Dorothy led the child on. Her thought had flown to an advertisement in the *Times* some days ago. Lady Ffrench, whether on her own initiative or the advice of her solicitor, had offered a reward to the chauffeur who had driven her child to 91a, Jermyn Street, on a certain afternoon; also the one who had driven her to Cook's and certain shops. Evidently she had had no response from either, or the men would have been brought into court as witnesses.

"Yes. And there was lots more in the dream," went on the child. "I never forgot it. I wouldn't believe it was a dream till Nina and the others said I'd never been out of the house. Why, I can see the room where I was with Sandie! I can see everything we did—how we went out in another taxi, and I sat in it part of the time while Sandie shopped. But I went with her to one or two shops where she bought things for me. There was a great crowd, and she was in a hurry.

"When we got back to the house we'd started from, the woman there with a foxy face told Sandie that my father had come. 'At least,' she said, 'it's a gentleman who says he's your husband.' So Sandie asked the woman to look after me a little while. I didn't want to go with her, but I did. She took me into some rooms —do you say a flat?—that belonged to a man. He was away, but Nina was there. She had come after

me, to bring me home. In the dream, of course. I didn't want to go away, because Sandie needed me. But Nina said my father was dreadfully sad about my being gone, and wanted to see me, if only for a few minutes. It wasn't he who'd called on mother. It was some other man. I wanted to see father, too—dreadfully much—so I came. Nina promised I should go back to Sandie in a little while. So I came home with her. That's the last thing I remember till I waked up feeling very queer and ill. I'd been talking in my sleep about the dream, Nina said. And I've never been quite well since."

Dorothy kissed the little white face.

"You soon will be, if I can do anything to make you so!" she exclaimed. A genuine tenderness for the child swept over her. She had begun her investigations entirely through her wish to "find the Dolarro woman out." Now, however, she had another motive, almost equally strong.

"If Miss Dolarro'd been mistaken, and you *had* gone to your mother, after all, you would have known what you did with that letter," the nurse said. "Then, if it had existed, it could have been found."

"Oh, the letter!" echoed Fay. "Why, I do know what I did with it—in the dream. I pinned it inside my dress, between the cloth part and the silk lining."

Dorothy realised that, if such a letter had been returned to Lady Ffrench, it would have been produced in court as some sort of proof that she had at least

wished to have her child with her in exile. Of course, the other side would have said that it was "manufactured evidence," and it might not have helped much.

"Do you remember what dress you wore—in the dream?" she catechised.

Fay nodded, and described the dress.

"You've got such a lot of dresses," smiled Dorothy. "Let's have a look in the wardrobe and see if it exists—shall we?"

Fay was pleased with the idea.

"Let's!" she agreed.

There, at the back of the wardrobe, behind all the other frocks, was one that answered the description. Dorothy could quite understand Nina's hiding it, but it seemed too good to be true that she hadn't discovered and removed the letter.

No! She had not! There was a folded bit of paper pinned inside the silk lining with a small safety-pin! Probably Fay hadn't mentioned the letter to Miss Dolarro, and so in her hurry it had not occurred to the governess to search. . . . With fingers that trembled, Dorothy took out the pin. In her hand was an envelope. While Fay watched with anxious eyes, the nurse extracted the letter within and read. For a moment her head swam. But she was sharp-witted beyond the average, and her reticence masked detective instincts. The whole plot became clear to her. With this letter, with Fay's ingenuous story, and the analysis

of that tonic (if it turned out as she expected) she would hold Nina Dolarro in the hollow of her hand.

A wicked woman, who deserved no mercy, and would get none from her!

CHAPTER XXIV

HUGH FFRENCH ought to have experienced a buoyant sense of relief when the law had freed him from the frivolous, faithless Golden Butterfly who had spoiled nearly eight years of his life. Instead, he had never felt so suicidally wretched.

He would have liked to cut loose from England that same night—to go somewhere far away, it didn't matter where. But he could not, would not leave Fay, whose illness added a dead weight to his burden of gloom. He must go home as usual, to see the child before her bedtime.

Nina was with him in the car which his chauffeur brought to the Law Courts, and which he chose to drive himself, sending the chauffeur home by motor-bus. Nina's company was soothing, though he had not craved it. She had asked him to take her, pleading as an excuse that she was so exhausted as to be almost ill.

"I need a *friend* with me," she said; "and I think, Sir Hugh, you're in a mood to need one, too."

"Perhaps," he answered; and as she sat beside him, her shoulder almost touching his, he felt the magnetism of what he fancied was her sympathy.

"Could we drive on and on, just for a little while, and not go home quite yet?" Nina asked. "The air feels so heavenly—it's making me all over new, after this terrible day. But how selfish of me to call it terrible! It's been so much worse for you than for me —an outsider!"

"I don't think of you as an outsider," Hugh said kindly. "You've become a much valued member of my family. You know that. Your wonderful, wonderful devotion to Fay——"

"Ah, I could never do half enough for either of you!" Nina sighed. "And now it's over! That's one thing I have to talk about before we get home. I have to tell you that the dear place can no longer be 'home' for me. Luckily Nurse Mintern is very good with Fay. The sweet little one doesn't need a governess while she's weak and unable to work at her studies. I'm not needed any more——"

"Indeed you *are* needed!" broke in Ffrench, startled. "Of course you must stay. I——"

"Perhaps you don't quite realise, dear Sir Hugh," Nina said, "that things are changed from to-night on. You are no longer a married man. You're young, and free. As for me, I'm nobody at all, of course, but—but I'm young, too, and I have to work for my living. Stupid as these conventions are, they exist. Dear Miss Ffrench has reminded me of them. I wouldn't have listened if Nurse Mintern weren't as useful to Fay now as I could be. But I have my reputation to think of.

I daren't risk being talked about more than—more than I have been already."

"Good God!" broke out Ffrench. "So you're going to leave us!"

"I must!" Nina answered in a stifled voice. Then, before he could speak again, to curse conventions or submit to them, she began to cry. "Oh, do forgive me!" she sobbed. "I am ashamed of myself. But—but I've been so *happy*—with *you*—in spite of all these troubles. It's been the most wonderful time of my life. To leave darling Fay, and—leave you both! The thought is breaking my heart!"

Hugh was deeply moved. He wasn't in love with this beautiful girl, though at times he had felt her strong physical fascination. So far from being in love with her, he feared that he was damned fool enough still to love Sandie, to long for the old days, years ago, when they had been for a little while all the world to each other. Still, it hurt him badly to hear Nina cry, and he did not wish to lose her out of his life and Fay's.

"I don't want to let you go," he said. "Is there no way of keeping you, without doing you harm? Could I live in Yorkshire, as I practically did a few months ago, and you stop in London with Fay? I could come home for week-ends, couldn't I, without making evil tongues wag?"

"I'm afraid you *couldn't,*" Nina wept. "Besides——"

"Besides—what?"

"I—I—— Oh, I *daren't* say what almost said itself."

"Please," Hugh begged. "I must know."

"Oh—*don't* you know. Can't you *guess?*" she faltered shaken with sobs again.

With a shock, Hugh did guess. He knew that the girl was in love with him. But he did not know what to do—did not know what he ought to do, or what he wanted to do.

The silence of that moment was terrible for them both.

Nina broke it with a low cry of anguish.

"Oh, stop the car! Let me get out!" she begged. "I can't bear it. I can't look you in the eyes again."

Then Ffrench made up his mind what to do. He couldn't let her suffer like this! He couldn't have her humiliated, this sweet and wonderful girl who was already like a second mother to Fay. As for himself he admired her intensely. If she cared, why shouldn't he make her happy, and perhaps, after a long time, find some sort of happiness, or shadow of happiness, himself?

"You will look me in the eyes many times, I hope," he said. "Nina, I'm not entirely free yet, but I shall be in a few months. And I'm free enough now to ask if you would care to be my wife when I can marry you?"

"Oh, *Hugh!*" the girl exclaimed. "Do you mean it? Do you *love* me? I love you so wildly that I can't believe such a heavenly thing has happened!"

"I'm going to love you very much. As much as you want me to, I think," he answered.

Two hours later, Derek Leavenworth was shown into Lady Ffrench's hotel sitting-room, she having yielded to Lady Beatrice Briggs's plea for him.

"Sandie, Bee says that you think I ruined your case instead of helping," he said. "God forgive me if I did! I swear I did my best. But they had us both in a trap. The only things I blame myself for are my carelessness in leaving that damned cigarette case lying about, my stupidity in paying for those ship tickets, and advising you to go straight from Mrs. Reynolds's flat to my sister's house. We all know what place is paved with good intentions! But I laid those paving-stones before the case began; and the mischief was done. To save you meant losing more than life to me, yet I would have done it if I could."

"It's too late for regrets now," Sandie said.

He had been standing, but, as if impulsively, he took a step forward and went down on one knee, his arms on the arms of her chair.

"Yes, it's too late for regrets, darling!" he echoed. "But it's not too late for glorious joy if you can forgive me. I adore you, and you know it. Life won't be worth living without you. I may have spoiled yours for the present, but I can remake it if you'll let me."

"If I *don't* let you—what's to become of me, I wonder?" Sandie said, more to herself than to him, for

Bee's words were ringing in her ears. "I don't know —I don't know! And yet I don't *want* you. I don't want any one at all—any one that I can have!"

"You feel like that now," Leavenworth soothed her. "But it's only a mood—a phase—after all that those two lying brutes have made you go through, in order to get each other—your ex-husband and the ex-governess. Let's save what we can of life. Honestly, I think this is the only way, for you as well as for *me*."

"Maybe you're right," Sandie agreed wearily. "I wonder!"

CHAPTER XXV

MISS Mary Ffrench had been in the Divorce Court all day, but she escaped immediately after the verdict, without waiting to speak to her brother. She had an agent of one of her charities to see, and after that she wished to arrive at Hugh's house in time to greet him cheerfully.

"Now dear Nina will have her chance!" she told herself, not guessing that the girl would already have taken that chance and won the game so far as it went.

Miss Ffrench rather expected that her protégée would appear on the scene earlier than Hugh; but time passed, and neither came. She grew restless, and decided to visit Fay and the new nurse, upstairs. Hugh was sure to come straight to his little daughter, the moment he got home, so his sister would lose nothing by spending the interval with her niece.

It was just about this time that Mrs. Harkness, in Paul Andrews's cheap little two-seater car, driven by himself, was leaving a café where she had refreshed herself after the fatigue of the stuffy Divorce Court. She and Andrews had been in the gallery all day, and indeed, all day every day while the "case" was on, and now she was going to exchange views as well as news with Nina at Sir Hugh Ffrench's house. Andrews

would take her there, and call for her again, though he had no intention of going in. The pair had just emptied two bottles of champagne, between them, after reinforcing themselves with *pâté de foies gras* sandwiches, and each had a happy outlook for the future.

Even if Mrs. Harkness had known that Miss Ffrench was in the house, she would still have persevered in her intention. There was no reason why she should not!

* * * * *

Nina Dolarro could have sung for joy as she entered the nursery with Hugh Ffrench, after their wonderful drive together.

He was *hers!* He didn't care for her as she wanted him to care, but he would—he would! She loved him more than she'd ever loved any man in her life, even more than she had loved Paul Andrews. Paul might be dangerous by and by, when he learned that she meant to be a true wife to Hugh Ffrench, the millionaire whom, in a way (concealing her past, paying her passage from New York to England, engaging a chaperon, lending Beech Hill Farm, and keeping himself in the background), he had helped her to secure. But she was so happy to-night at having brought off her *coup* that she felt great confidence in her own wits. She had wriggled out of many scrapes. She would wriggle out of this one when the time came.

Meanwhile, there was nothing serious to worry about. Now that the case had come to a favourable

end, she could cease—gradually, of course—to doctor Fay's medicine. Slowly the child might be allowed to get well—which was a load off Nina's mind. Part of her "pull" with Ffrench came through her devotion to his daughter, and Fay would be useful to her until she had a baby of her own. She had suffered a good deal of anxiety during the past few weeks, seeing how fast the child failed, and fearing catastrophe. Oh, she would be a new woman from to-night!

For an instant Nina was pleased that Miss Ffrench should be with Fay when she came home (yes, "home" was truly the word now!) with Hugh. Old Mary loved her, and wanted her to marry Hugh. To tell her in confidence of the secret engagement would clinch it, if clinching were needed! But the stricken look on her friend's face gave her a fright. Why should Hugh's sister look stricken, when all had gone so well to-day?

A quick glance round the cheerful nursery showed Nina that Dorothy Mintern and Fay were also excited. The nurse's meekness was gone. Her cheeks were scarlet, her eyes bright, her chin high. And the child—why, it seemed to Nina that the child had come back to life!

There had been a sound of voices before Hugh's knock. But silence fell as the door opened—an ominous silence, Nina felt, with a strange, instinctive pang.

"What is the matter?" she asked sharply. "What has happened?"

"A terrible thing has happened," Miss Ffrench spoke. "Nina, you miserable girl—*you have been found out!*"

Nina's blood drained away from her heart. She felt cold and sick. She could not speak. It was Hugh who exclaimed with indignation:

"Found out!"

Mary turned to him.

"This hurts me more than you. I loved her—not so much for her sake, at first, as her father's—the one romance of my life! Some time I'll tell you what I never breathed to any one. I'd protect her even now if I could without hurting others. But it can't be done. It's those others—not she—who need protection. And even if I could keep silence, this girl—this nurse—wouldn't. Hugh, Nina Dolarro has been poisoning Fay. Keeping her ill, so that the truth wouldn't come out—the truth about Sandie. It looks as if Melisande had been innocent—persecuted. God knows what other sins besides this, and daily lies, Nina Dolarro has been guilty of. But I'm afraid she's bribed witnesses—that Sutton woman and others. I lent her money—a good deal of money. I thought it was to pay old debts of her father's that had cropped up. But, putting two and two together, I fear—oh, Hugh, you will have to ferret out the whole thing—for Melisande's sake! I feel a deep sense of guilt towards her. I never liked her. I believed honestly that she was the wrong wife for you. I rejoiced in this divorce. I saw happiness

ahead for you with—ah, this is the heaviest blow of my life!"

"Don't believe her, Hugh—*my* Hugh!" Nina implored. "She must have gone out of her mind."

"It seems like it," Hugh answered, though at those words, "Melisande innocent—persecuted," his heart had leaped.

"I almost wish I *were* out of my mind!" groaned Mary Ffrench. "What I feel to-day brings back the day when I lost this girl's father. I loved him so! I had been travelling in Italy. I was going to run away with him, Hugh. I thought he was free—that the one barrier was his being Catholic. But his Irish wife arrived in Naples, just in time, with her child—a girl of five. I was only nineteen, yet it was the end of my youth. I have been old ever since. To-day has broken me! I forgave Luigi his deceit, for he did love me, I think—it wasn't all for my money. But I can't forgive his daughter—so like him in face!—for trying to poison Fay and ruin Melisande."

"What does she mean, Nina?" Hugh asked the girl. "What has she got hold of by the wrong end, and misjudged you?"

"Stop!" cried Mary Ffrench. "Let Nurse Mintern tell you what she has told me. Read the chemist's analysis of Fay's medicine doctored by this wicked girl—they've just sent it—and the prescription for the real medicine Dr. Barnes prescribed. Look at the letter Melisande wrote to Fay the day before she left

this house. It's been found pinned into the lining of the child's dress she wore that afternoon. Hear Fay's story of what happened then; the story Nina made her think was the nonsense of a dream. Nina herself went to the Reynold's flat, and brought Fay home—then pretended that the child had never been out. There has been a horrible plot—drugging, bribery, corruption!"

"Hugh—*my* Hugh—don't listen to these women! Don't listen even to Fay!" Nina pleaded. "Let me defend myself. The plot's *their* plot, against me. I——"

But she stopped, with a start, at a sharp knock on the door. A servant announced a lady to see her—"Mrs. Harkness."

For a second Nina hesitated, inclined to send Mrs. Harkness away; but she needed a friend—she might need her desperately! "Bring Mrs. Harkness here," she directed. And when Mrs. Harkness came, Nina threw herself into the substantial arms, sobbing as if her heart would burst. Partly the outbreak was genuine. Her nerves had been on edge for weeks, and to-day had been a great crisis. Partly it was acting, for she thought that Hugh Ffrench was a man who might be moved by a girl's tears.

"Oh, Harky, I'm so miserable!" she wept. "I've tried my best here. And now they accuse me of horrible things! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Mrs. Harkness stared, dull eyed for a few heavy seconds. She had prescribed herself a stiff but not

unpleasant dose of champagne as a tonic, to help her shake off the after effects of 'flu'; and instead of quickening her wits, it had slowed them down.

"Is—is it Paul Andrews?" she stammered, looking from one face to the other.

Nina snatched herself away, giving her friend a sharp little push. She could have killed the woman for letting her down, for ruining her, by stuttering that name.

Was there any hope that Hugh hadn't caught it? Almost mechanically she threw him a glance. There was no hope that way. He had heard. And she knew that the fury she could not control had blazed in her eyes. For an instant she had shown the depths of her soul, and nothing she could say or do would ever make Hugh Ffrench forget what he had seen. His faith in her was gone. And worse, he was *glad*—she saw that he was glad, because her falseness gave back truth to one he loved as he would never have loved her. Because she was found out, she could not hold him through his honour. . . . In this moment, Nina knew that what—before she loved him—she had called "the game" was up.

Lacking Hugh Ffrench's love and allegiance there was no loophole for her anywhere. Rehabilitating Mrs. Ffrench meant that the Sutton woman would give Nina Dolarro away. And the two taxi-drivers (whom she had bribed with Mary Ffrench's money) would be made to turn against her also. Sandie Ffrench would

almost surely not marry Derek Leavenworth. She was more likely, judging by the desperate defence she had put up in court, to forgive Hugh, and come back to him some day.

Nina would not in that case receive her five thousand pounds from Leavenworth. The post-dated cheque she held was useless. If she tried to cash it, without doubt it would be returned from his bank "refer to drawer." It seemed impossible that the story of her downfall could be kept out of the newspapers. Even the attempt at poisoning Fay might be made public through Dorothy Mintern, though Hugh Ffrench would almost certainly not prosecute.

There was no future for her in England after such a ghastly collapse, unless with Paul Andrews whom she no longer loved: and he had never meant marriage. To be sure, Nina could return to America and get engagements to dance at cabarets, as she had successfully danced in the days of her acquaintance with Lord Derek Leavenworth in Washington. And she had been a brilliant figure in her way and in her day. And she might repeat her old triumphs: but only if she could find as good a dancing partner as Paul Andrews.

Her dancing partner he had been at a time when his portrait painting had failed to produce fortune. They had adored each other then, the clever pair, and had been much gossiped about. But Nina had not minded, because all the gossip was true and Nina's

one regret was that it had perhaps held back one or two infatuated millionaires.

Always there had been the danger that stiff old Mary Ffrench might learn what she was doing, disapprove and cease to be the useful friend she had been from a distance, for many years. A change of name, however, had kept Mary in blissful ignorance, and had served other purposes as well. Nina could go back to the States, now that all was lost here; meanwhile Paul had saved a little money and come into some more. He wasn't likely to give up Beech Hill for the second time, when London society was beginning to appreciate his talent as a portrait painter. And Nina Dolarro was no longer worth to him what Nina Ffrench would have been.

The best field open to her, it seemed, was a new one—some rich, beauty-loving country like Spain or South America—and even that might be closed if she were brought to book for the poisoning episode. She must make Hugh see clearly that, at worst, she had never meant to kill Fay, only to dull the child's memory, then to keep her too weak to bear witness in Lady Ffrench's favour. It was in this desperate hope that she began confessing to Hugh, ignoring his sister.

But then, when Mary refused to be ignored, and broke maddeningly into Nina's stumbling protestations; when even Nurse Mintern was allowed to fling accusations, and in the end to rush out of the room with Fay in her arms as if Nina Dolarro's beautiful presence

was infectious as flowers of belladonna; when Hugh stared as if he'd been turned to stone, and when Mrs. Harkness became hopelessly hysterical and silly, the girl's Irish-Italian nature of mixed passions gained the upper hand. She wept, she shrieked, she reviled Hugh and his child in ugly words that deformed her lovely lips, she flung out hideous hints about Sandie with Derek Leavenworth, and of "old Mary" with her Italian lover of long ago—Nina's own father.

"Paul Andrews is worth ten of you, with all your money, Hugh Ffrench!" she raged. "You're no man. You're a stone!" And in the next breath prayed Hugh to love her again, or at least to forgive. She had meant no real harm against his child. She had had to defend her own interests, since no one else would protect her. She would tell everything—everything about her bargain with Leavenworth, her bribing the Sutton woman, and how she got into touch with the taxi-drivers through Lady Ffrench's advertisement, and a smart *coup* of her own. Yes, she would do that for money. She must have money now that she had lost everything and every one.

Horrified, disgusted, almost frozen, Hugh listened to the end, scarcely interrupting, trying to keep his sister quiet. It was only when the woman broke down utterly—this terrible woman he had believed to be an angel!—that he spoke more than a dozen words.

"Miss Dolarro," he said, "even if you're not a would-be murderess, you've done your damnedest to

ruin two lives for your own utterly selfish motives, and there's little doubt that you've pretty well destroyed their chances of future happiness. By God! there's nothing too bad for you if justice were done! But you're a woman, and it can't give me or my wife back what you've torn from us by lies and fraud, to punish you as you deserve. Now, while you've stood there throwing the vitriol of your soul into my face, I've been making up my mind what to do next. My wife, the girl who was my wife till you parted us!—shall hear about the bribed witnesses. The new evidence which exonerates her by supporting her own testimony about Fay, and all the rest, shall be put into her hands. She can appeal against the verdict of divorce. The whole case will be tried over again, and she will win, hands down. The one thing kept back from her at present, anyhow, shall be the cause of Fay's illness, and how you made the child believe that she had dreamed. It will come out, in decent justice to her, that you schemed for my wife's ruin, that you bribed witnesses, that you actually stole Fay from her and then lied to the child—lied to everybody. The one detail that won't come out in public is this poison business. You'll be punished by the law for perjury. I can't help that. I'm out of it. But you won't be punished for slowly poisoning a little trusting child whose guardian you were. That—which you richly deserve —you shall be spared. It won't matter to you that I feel you deserve a life sentence in prison."

"Thank you for nothing!" screamed Nina, through the sobbings and gaspings of hysteria. "I could defend myself against such a monstrous charge if you made it! I hate you all! I'm glad I've made you unhappy—glad! I hope you'll be as wretched as I am—all of you, all your lives long! I'd like to see you burn in hell, Hugh Ffrench!"

Hugh gazed at her icily, no longer moved outwardly by his disgust.

"It's late," he said. "Would you care to go to your room or do you prefer to leave my house with your friend, Mrs. Harkness, who seems to have been a faithful servant of yours and this Mr. Andrews, till she lost her head a little to-night. I warn you that it will be useless to try and escape from the ordeal you have to face. You'll be watched from the moment you pass out of his house. A telephone message to a detective agency will guarantee that. But go—or stay the night here—as you choose."

"I choose to go," Nina answered, marble pale. Perhaps even at that moment there was a certain purpose in her distraught brain.

CHAPTER XXVI

LEAVENWORTH was still with her, in her flower-filled sitting-room, when Sandie Ffrench's telephone rang sharply.

It was a relief to hear it and have to answer it, for Lord Derek was becoming tiresome. She had wished him to give her a few days to make up her mind about the future, but he was too wise (for his own interests) to grant her even one hour's delay. He wanted a promise, and he wanted it sealed with a kiss on Sandie's beautiful lips. For, despite all the Butterfly's pretty indiscretions, she had never once let him kiss her lips. He didn't believe that any man except Hugh Ffrench had ever touched Sandie's lips—had ever done more than kiss her hand—and for this very reason he felt that a kiss from the Princess would really seal a promise—if the promise could be dragged out.

Sandie snatched away the hand he had seized, and pulled herself from him at the sound of the telephone.

Derek let her go, imagining that at so late an hour (it was nearly eleven) no one save his sister, Beatrice Briggs, was likely to call Sandie up. He watched her critically as she lifted the silk-clad, crinoline doll that hid the telephone on her desk, and thought with self-congratulation that she had never looked quite so pretty

as now, when she sat down, taking up the instrument in her child-like hand. Her profile was exquisite. The light from a shaded lamp turned her hair to living gold, and brought out magic gleams on white neck and silver rest-gown. Suddenly, however, the listening expression changed. Colour flushed the cheek that Leavenworth could see. She started as if a current of electricity ran through her.

"Yes, come," she replied to some question, when she had listened for a full minute in quivering silence. "Come as soon as you can. And tell them downstairs I said you needn't wait to be announced."

Derek was more sure than before that it must have been his sister speaking.

"I suppose it's Bee?" he said.

"No, it's not Bee," Sandie answered.

"Not Bee! But you don't want anyone else to come and find me here, do you?" he exclaimed.

"That is just what I do want—with this particular person," she returned. And it seemed to Leavenworth that her voice was hard and strange.

"Will you tell me who the person is?" he asked stiffly.

"You will see in a few minutes—if you're brave enough to wait."

"Brave enough?" he repeated. "Good Lord, I've nothing to fear from any one."

"Then stay."

"Most certainly I will!" he boasted, and tried to take

up the conversation where it had been broken off by the telephone-bell.

But for some reason this could not be done. For some reason which he was unable to understand, he could no more have touched Sandie again than if a stage safety-curtain of cold iron had been let down between them.

Five minutes passed. Ten minutes passed. Leavenworth did his best to make the adored one discuss future plans, but she was absent-minded, and gave evasive answers. Mechanically Derek glanced at the clock. Twelve minutes gone since this blight had fallen on the two of them! Could it be that Sandie's solicitor was calling? Or some relative just arrived from America to help or scold her? . . . Thirteen minutes . . . A knock at the door! A nervous: "Come in!" from Sandie, and the last person on earth whom Leavenworth had expected to see walked in—Hugh Ffrench.

Derek sprang up from the low, cushioned chair where he had been sprawling—and it is difficult to spring from a very low chair with graceful agility. He felt awkward, for the first time since his boyhood; and the look Ffrench gave him brought the blood to his face as if his ears had been boxed. But he kept his countenance, and gave back hard stare for hard stare.

"Hugh," Sandie began, "when you told me you

wanted to come, and why, I asked Lord Derek Leavenworth to stay. I thought it would be best."

"You thought rightly," Ffrench said. "Lord Derek Leavenworth is——"

"Is going to be Lady Ffrench's husband," Leavenworth cut in.

Hugh looked at Sandie.

"Is that true?" he asked.

"No," she replied, her voice trembling. "But it might have been true if you hadn't told me what you did through the telephone."

"You would have married him?"

"I would have given him an answer to-morrow—or the day after, maybe. Oh, perhaps he'd even have made me give it to-night! And perhaps it would have been 'yes'! What else was there—what had you left me, Hugh—in life?"

"What else is there left for you now?" broke in Leavenworth. "What has happened to change things between us, dear little Princess? This man is no longer your husband. He threw you over for another woman. It's been a cruel, wicked case, and——"

"It was your doing!" Hugh cut him short. "I know the whole story now—the whole plot. . . . Miss Dolarro has confessed not only her part in it, but yours. You beast! You damned coward, hiding behind a woman's skirts!"

Leavenworth leapt at him, and tall and lithe as

Hugh Ffrench was, the other was a bigger, stronger man than he.

Sandie cried out; but Hugh, though not a giant, had a better trick than David knew when he attacked Goliath. With a queer little twist that looked like magic, he brought Leavenworth to his knees without a sound.

"We won't fight before my wife!" he said.

"You're a coward to use jiu-jitsu!" stuttered Leavenworth. "And she is not your wife!"

"She soon will be, again, please God," Ffrench flung at him. "I have always loved her, through this whole beastly maze of deceit and cheating. I shall love her till I die—and after. It's just my Fate—that's all. What about you, Sandie, my girl—my poor little child, hounded through this mire of wretchedness."

"Little child!" He had called her that in the old days. Suddenly tears poured from Sandie's eyes.

"Oh, Hugh!" she cried out sharply. "I've always loved you, too. I've wanted to die. I thought my heart was broken."

"I'll mend it!" Hugh promised, then jerked Leavenworth to his feet, with another "unsportsmanlike" jiu-jitsu twist. "Get out of this, you damned swine!" he said. "I've got proof of everything—the blackmailing of Miss Dolarro; your post-dated cheque; the way you sneaked into Mrs. Reynolds's flat; why you went into the bedroom to leave your cigarette-case as evidence; why you paid for my wife's ship tickets, and of whom you borrowed the money to do it. Your

name will be black in the eyes of all England! Now go—while the going's good!—and leave my wife and me alone together."

"Princess, do you tell me to go and leave you with this man?" Leavenworth stammered. "I won't stir till you do—not if Ffrench and I have to kill each other."

"Oh, go—go!" breathed Sandie. "I wish I need never see you again on this earth!"

Leavenworth went, without another word or a backward look; and slowly Sandie turned to Hugh. They gazed at each other forlornly, wistfully, like two lovers parted by a transparent yet impassably thick wall of glass.

"Can you forgive me for believing it all?" Hugh asked.

"Can you forgive me," Sandie choked, "for making it so terribly easy to believe? I've been a fool, Hugh. But I've never, never been wicked. And are you sure you didn't fall in love with that beast of a girl? Are you sure you're not sad in your heart, now she's confessed and you know how cruel she was?"

"I swear I never loved her," Hugh answered. "I never really loved any woman but you. I was miserable, and she sympathised. And, so far from being sad, I'd be ready to shout for joy if we hadn't to go through all that hateful business of the Divorce Court again."

"Must we go through it?" Sandie shuddered.

"Yes, we must, darling child, to exonerate you in the eyes of the silly old world. For my sake as well as yours—though I don't deserve that, or anything—and for Fay's sake, all the mud thrown at you—that I let them throw, God forgive me!—has got to be washed off again. Then, Sandie, we'll be married for love!"

"I married you for love before," she exclaimed.

"We thought that what we felt was the best love we had to give. But next time we shall know."

CHAPTER XXVII

IT was a desolate drive for Nina Dolarro, back to Surrey with Mrs. Harkness and Paul Andrews.

There had been for her a faint hint of comfort in the thought of being with Paul. Her old passion for him was spent, and overwhelmed by another so strong that the first seemed as nothing, when she looked back. Still, they had cared for each other. He was handsome and attractive. He had a delightful home, and the money to keep a wife in pretty clothes and a good enough position, especially if he worked industriously at his art. And Nina believed that she could keep him up to his work, if he'd give her the chance. She had not been in the car five minutes, however, after sobbing out the tale of her defeat, when Andrews made her aware without words that he felt no more inclined to marry her than he had ever felt—perhaps less. For he admired success.

"Mrs. Harkness has made arrangements to sail," he said. "Of course, I thought your affairs were settled all right, and that, as you'd no longer any need for a chaperon, she'd be a useless expense to me. In fact, I've let Beech Hill Farm—let it very well, and the people move in next week. So that's that. When Harky travels up to town to take the boat train, I'm afraid

you'll have to travel with her, Nina, as you can't stay in Surrey with me. You see that, don't you? Besides it would be impossible for you to live in the country, if this damned case is coming on again, with you the most important figure in it."

Nina had thought herself as wretched as she could be, but she discovered that there were even lower depths. She had been almost sure he wouldn't marry her. But to be talked to like this was too much.

"It seems impossible for me to live anywhere!" she moaned.

And late that night she repeated the same words, gazing in utter despair at herself in the mirror, while she wept bitterly at the waste of so much beauty and youth.

"But it can't be helped! It can't be helped! There's nothing left for me, if I don't want to go down to the dregs!" she sobbed. "After all the disgrace they'll drag me through in court, it will be the end—the end! Oh, I hope everybody will be sorry when they find they've hounded me to this!"

"This" was a dose of veronal that she knew would send her into a sleep from which there would be no waking on this earth.

* * * * *

But no one was really sorry to hear the news of Nina Dolarro's death. Leavenworth was glad. And even Mary Ffrench sighed to herself, "Perhaps it's for

the best. It saves so much horror and publicity for us all."

Nina's suicide was in itself a confession of guilt, and the evidence of Mrs. Sutton and the two taxi-drivers (easily dug up from their obscurity) was sensational, in the light that it turned upon the dead girl's late testimony. In death she had escaped a good deal, so far as this world knew.

If the Ffrench case had been a sensation in its first phase, it was a double sensation in its second, when the decree *nisi* was quashed, and the divorce rescinded. After all, Hugh Ffrench and Sandie, "the Princess—the Butterfly," remained husband and wife! There was no need for them to "marry each other again," and it was no secret that both were delighted. If they had been in love with one another eight years before, they were a hundred times more in love now—enough in love, it seemed, to make up for the wasted years when they had drifted apart.

It was not until all was over, and they were together again—"truly at home for the first time in ages," as Sandie quaintly said—that Hugh told her the one secret he had kept, the secret of Nina Dolarro's crime against the child.

"I promised her that it shouldn't come out," he said, "because I do believe the story that she swore was truth. She didn't mean to kill Fay. It was veronal the first time, the day she stole the child from you. But after that the stuff she added to the doctor's medi-

cine was aspirin and ipecac—lowering, sickening stuff that kept the poor baby too ill to be dragged into court as a witness. It would never have killed—unless Fay's strength was gradually so sapped that she——"

"That she just faded away, the poor lamb!" Sandie flashed out. "The fiend! That might have happened. But, oh! you were right, I suppose! It would only have made a more horrid scandal, and no good done. Still I can't be sorry that that terrible woman is safely dead. If she'd lived, I should always have been afraid of her. She would have been capable of anything—even vitriol in our faces! Ugh! I can't bear to think of it!"

"Don't think of it, dearest," Hugh said. "All's well that ends well. Let's be happy."

They were in each other's arms for the dozenth time that happy day.

"Yes," Sandie agreed. "Let's be happy. And the first thing, is to go and play with Fay. We never used to go to her together."

Dorothy Mintern was still with the child. Hugh and Sandie found Fay—already rosier and gayer than in the bad old days—reading a letter without envelope, which nurse had just neatly opened for her with a thin paper-knife.

"Oh, darling father and Sandie!" Fay said. "I do love this day! I've got you both again, and I'm going to have you always, all my life, if I live to be a hundred. And now, there's just come a letter from Peter

Arden. He's my friend. He's eleven to-day, and he likes his school, but he's in a hurry to get to Eton and Oxford, because he'll come of age sooner, you know. And on that birthday, when he's twenty-one, he and I are going to be married, of course, like you are! Won't that be splendid? I'll be eighteen, then, just what Sandie was when she was married, father. She's Lady Ffrench, and I'll be Lady Arden. It's not much more than ten years to wait!"

Hugh and Sandie, clasping each other and the child, burst out laughing.

"But it isn't a joke!" Fay protested with dignity.

"Not if you're always such a faithful, loyal little soul as you are and have always been," Hugh comforted her.

"I will be," Fay said. "Oh, aren't we happy! I used to be afraid it wasn't a very nice world, even if God had taken so much trouble to make it. But I see now, it's wonderful."

THE END

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Lynch Lawyers. William Patterson White.

McCarty Incog. Isabel Ostrander.
Major, The. Ralph Connor.
Maker of History, A. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Malefactor, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Man and Maid. Elinor Glyn.
Man from Bar 20, The. Clarence E. Mulford.
Man from the Bitter Roots, The. Caroline Lockhart.
Man in the Moonlight, The. Rupert S. Holland.
Man in the Twilight, The. Ridgwell Cullum.
Man Killers, The. Dane Coolidge.
Man Who Couldn't Sleep, The. Arthur Stringer.
Man's Country. Peter Clark Macfarlane.
Marqueray's Duel. Anthony Pryde.
Martin Conisby's Vengeance. Jeffery Farnol.
Mary-Gusta. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Mary Wollaston. Henry Kitchell Webster.
Mason of Bar-X Ranch. H. Bennett.
Master of Man. Hall Caine.
Master Mummer, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes. A. Conan Doyle.
Men Who Wrought, The. Ridgwell Cullum.
Meredith Mystery, The. Natalie Sumner Lincoln.
Midnight of the Ranges. George Gilbert.
Mine with the Iron Door, The. Harold Bell Wright.
Mischief Maker, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Missioner, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Miss Million's Maid. Berta Ruck.
Money, Love and Kate. Eleanor H. Porter.
Money Master, The. Gilbert Parker.
Money Moon, The. Jeffery Farnol.
Moonlit Way, The. Robert W. Chambers.
More Limehouse Nights. Thomas Burke.
More Tish. Mary Roberts Rinehart.
Moreton Mystery, The. Elizabeth Dejeans.
Mr. and Mrs. Sen. Louise Jordan Miln.
Mr. Grex of Monte Carlo. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Mr. Pratt. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Mr. Pratt's Patients. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Mrs. Red Pepper. Grace S. Richmond.
Mr. Wu. Louise Jordan Miln.
My Lady of the North. Randall Parrish.
My Lady of the South. Randall Parrish.
Mystery Girl, The. Carolyn Wells.

Mystery of the Hasty Arrow, The. Anna K. Green
Mystery of the Silver Dagger, The. Randall Parrish.

Nameless River. Vingie E. Roe.
Ne'er Do-Well, The. Rex Beach. (Photoplay Ed.).
Net, The. Rex Beach.
Never Fail Blake. Arthur Stringer.
Next Corner, The. Kate Jordan.
Nightfall. Anthony Pryde.
Night Horseman, The. Max Brand.
Night of the Wedding, The. C. N. and A. M. Williamson.
Night Operator, The. Frank L. Packard.
Night Riders, The. Ridgwell Cullum.
Nine Unknown, The. Talbot Mundy.
Nobody's Man. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
No Defence. Gilbert Parker.
North. James B. Hendryx.

Obstacle Race, The. Ethel M. Dell.
Odds. Ethel M. Dell.
Old Misery. Hugh Pendexter.
Omoo. Herman Melville.
One Thing Is Certain. Sophie Kerr.
One-Way Trail, The. Ridgwell Cullum.
Ordeal of Honor, An. Anthony Pryde.
Outlaw, The. Jackson Gregory.
Owner of the Lazy D. William Patterson White.

Panelled Room, The. Rupert Sargent Holland.
Paradise Bend. William Patterson White.
Pardners. Rex Beach.
Partners of the Tide. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Patricia Brent, Spinster. Anonymous.
Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail, The. Ralph Connor.
Paul Anthony, Christian. Hiram W. Hayes.
Pawned. Frank L. Packard.
Pawns Count, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Pay Gravel. Hugh Pendexter.
Peacemakers, The. Hiram W. Hayes.
Peregrine's Progress. Jeffery Farnol.
Peter Ruff and the Double Four. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Phantom Wires. Arthur Stringer.
Pointed Towers, The. Vance Thompson.
Pollyanna; "The Glad Book." Eleanor H. Porter. (Lim. Ed.).
Trade Mark—Trade-Mark.
Poor Man's Rock. Bertrand W. Sinclair.
Poor Wise Man, A. Mary Roberts Rinehart.

Poisoned Paradise, The. Robert W. Service. (Photoplay Ed.).
Portygee, The. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Possession. Olive Wadsley.
Postmaster, The. Joseph C. Lincoln.
Prairie Child, The. Arthur Stringer.
Prairie Flowers. James B. Hendryx.
Prairie Mother, The. Arthur Stringer.
Prairie Wife, The. Arthur Stringer.
Pretender, The. Robert W. Service.
Prince of Sinners, A. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Prodigal Daughters, The. Joseph Hocking. (Photoplay Ed.).
Prodigal Son, Hall Caine. (Photoplay Ed.).
Profiteers, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Promise, The. J. B. Hendryx.
Public Square, The. Will Levington Comfort.
Purple Mask, The. Louise Jordan Miln.
Purple Pearl, The. Anthony Pryde.

Quemado. William West Winter.
Quest of the Sacred Slipper, The. Sax Rohmer.
Quill's Window. George Barr McCutcheon.

Rainbow's End, The. Rex Beach.
Rainbow Valley. L. M. Montgomery.
Ramshackle House. Hulbert Footner.
Ranch at the Wolverine, The. B. M. Bower.
Ranching for Sylvia. Harold Bindloss.
Rangy Pete. Guy Morton.
Raspberry Jam. Carolyn Wells.
Reclaimers, The. Margaret Hill McCarter.
Re-Creation of Brian Kent, The. Harold Bell Wright.
Red and Black. Grace S. Richmond.
Red Pepper Burns. Grace S. Richmond.
Red Pepper's Patients. Grace S. Richmond.
Red Seal, The. Natalie Sumner Lincoln.
Restless Sex, The. Robert W. Chambers.
Return of Dr. Fu-Manchu, The. Sax Rohmer.
Return of Frank Clamart, The. Henry C. Rowland.
Return of Tarzan, The. Edgar Rice Burroughs.
Riddle of the Frozen Flame, The. M. E. and T. W. Hanshew.
Riddle of the Mysterious Light, The. M. E. and T. W. Hanshew.
Riddle of the Purple Emperor, The. M. E. and T. W. Hanshew.
Riddle of the Spinning Wheel, The. M. E. and T. W. Hanshew.